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MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
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MIGHTIEST MONARCH OF A TIME-LOST LAND!
KING CONAN™
THE LADY'S NAME IS TROUBLE!
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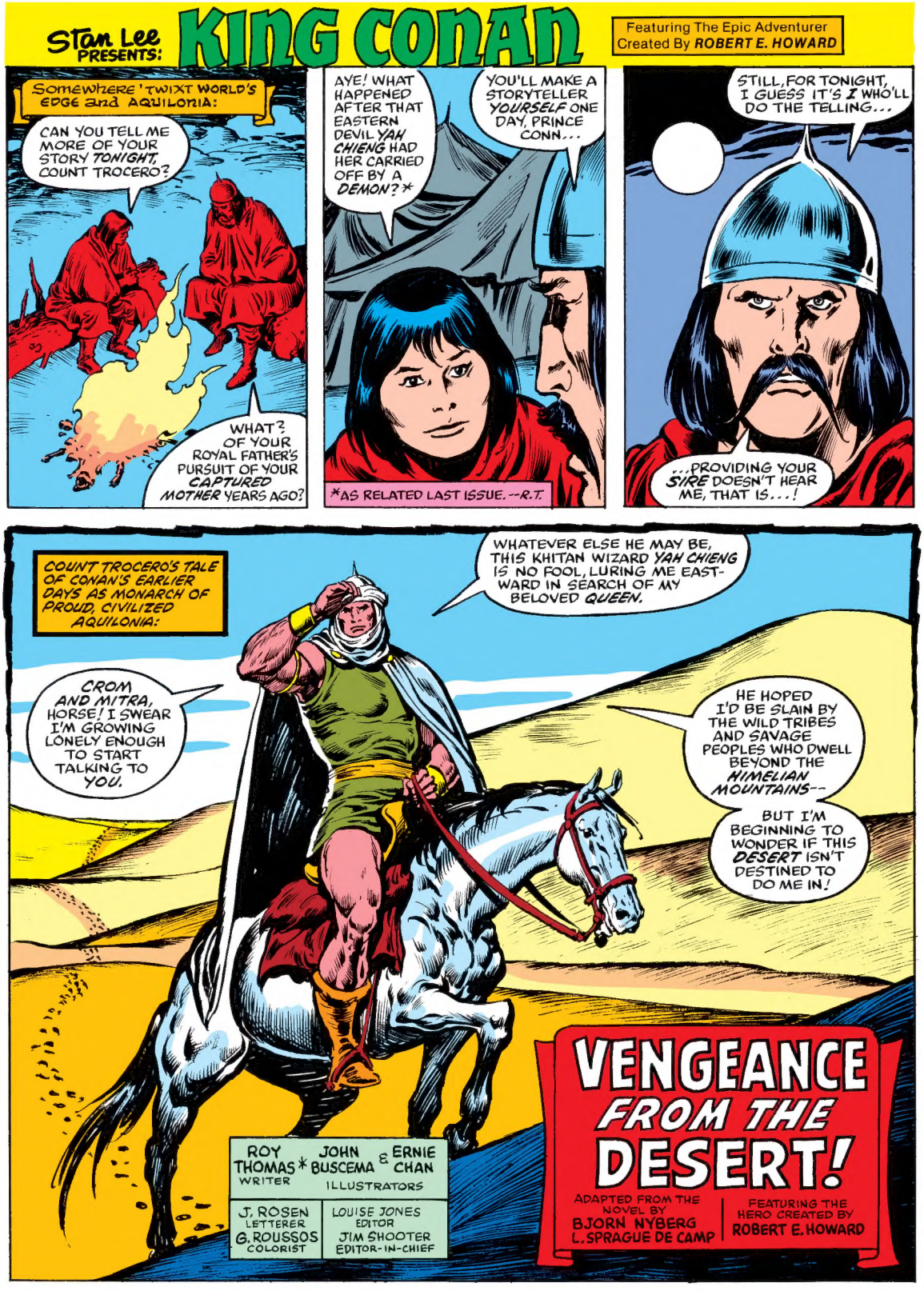
Stan Lee PRESENTS: KING CONAN
Featuring The Epic Adventurer Created By ROBERT E. HOWARD
Somewhere 'twixt world's edge and Aquilonia:
CAN YOU TELL ME MORE OF YOUR STORY TONIGHT, COUNT TROCERO?
WHAT? OF YOUR ROYAL FATHER'S PURSUIT OF YOUR CAPTURED MOTHER YEARS AGO?
AYE! WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT EASTERN DEVIL YAH CHIENG HAD HER CARRIED OFF BY A DEMON?*
YOU'LL MAKE A STORYTELLER YOURSELF ONE DAY, PRINCE CONN...
*AS RELATED LAST ISSUE.--R.T.
STILL, FOR TONIGHT, I GUESS IT'S I WHO'LL DO THE TELLING...
...PROVIDING YOUR SIRE DOESN'T HEAR ME, THAT IS...!
COUNT TROCERO'S TALE OF CONAN'S EARLIER DAYS AS MONARCH OF PROUD, CIVILIZED AQUILONIA:
CROM AND MITRA, HORSE! I SWEAR I'M GROWING LONELY ENOUGH TO START TALKING TO YOU.
WHATEVER ELSE HE MAY BE, THIS KHITAN WIZARD YAH CHIENG IS NO FOOL, LURING ME EASTWARD IN SEARCH OF MY BELOVED QUEEN.
HE HOPED I'D BE SLAIN BY THE WILD TRIBES AND SAVAGE PEOPLES WHO DWELL BEYOND THE HIMELIAN MOUNTAINS--
BUT I'M BEGINNING TO WONDER IF THIS DESERT ISN'T DESTINED TO DO ME IN!
VENGEANCE FROM THE DESERT!
ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL BY BJORN NYBERG & L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
FEATURING THE HERO CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD
ROY THOMAS * WRITER
JOHN BUSCEMA & ERNIE CHAN ILLUSTRATORS
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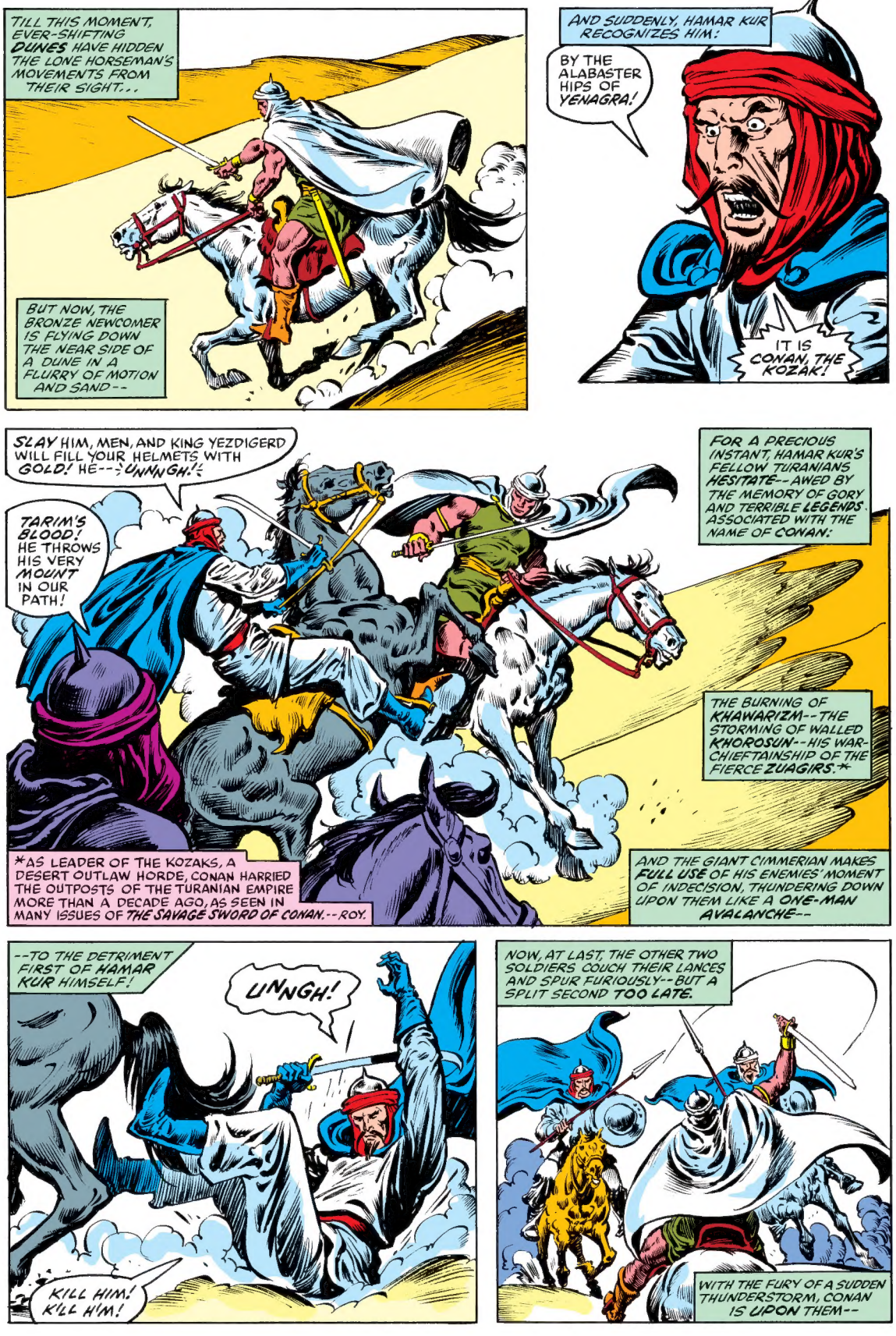
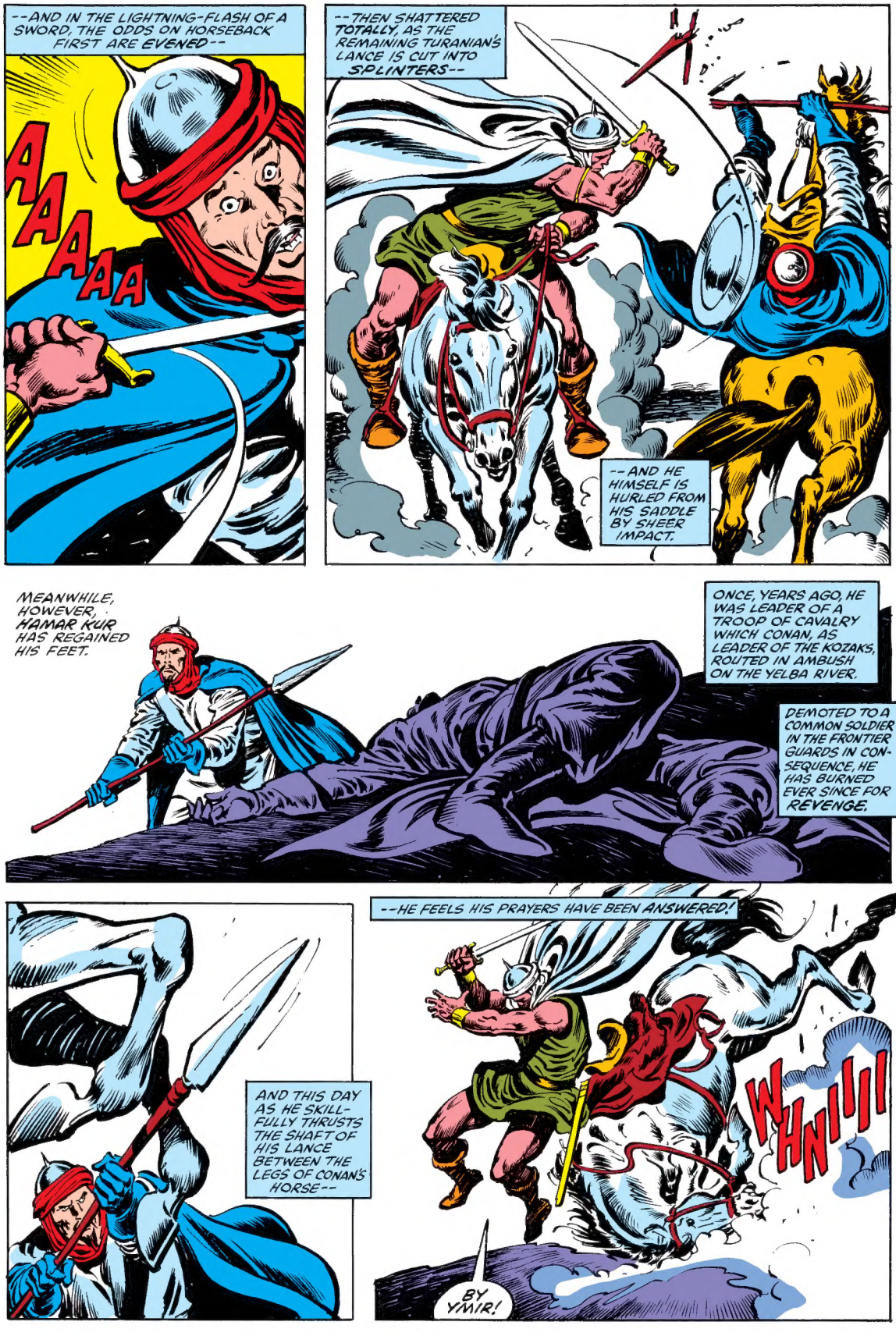
AHEAD, THE SUN GLINTS ON SPIRED HELMETS AND WHETTED SPEARHEADS.
HERE IN THE WIDE DESERT THAT FORMS THE SOUTHWESTERN MARCHES OF KING YEZDIGERD'S EMPIRE, THAT CAN MEAN BUT ONE THING:
TURANIANS!
THE CAPTIVE ZUAGIR DOG IS LAGGING, HAMAR KUR!
AYE! PERHAPS WE SHOULD LEAVE HIM HERE TO ROT.
NO, DOG-BROTHERS. YOU KNOW OUR COMMANDER WANTS TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF ANY ZUAGIRS WE CAPTURE...
AND THERE'S ANOTHER ONE, I'LL WAGER, ATOP THAT FAR DUNE!
ALL THIS CHASING ABOUT! IF ONLY WE'D NOT BEEN SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF OUR TROOP BY THAT SANDSTORM...!
WE'LL SIMPLY LOOK THE MORE COURAGEOUS WHEN WE REACH FORT WAKLA, FOOL.
NO NEED TO TELL OUR GREAT LEADER WE DIDN'T SLAY A DOZEN MORE LIKE HIM -- AND ONLY CAUGHT THIS ONE BECAUSE HIS HORSE STUMBLED UNDER HIM.
WE'LL LEAVE THE DOG HERE A WHILE... AND BRING HIM COMPANIONSHIP OF HIS OWN KIND.
BY ERLIK, WE'LL TEACH THOSE ZUAGIRS TO HARRY TURAN'S CARAVANS, AS IF THIS WERE THE OLD DAYS!


TILL THIS MOMENT, EVER-SHIFTING DUNES HAVE HIDDEN THE LONE HORSEMAN'S MOVEMENTS FROM THEIR SIGHT...
BUT NOW, THE BRONZE NEWCOMER IS FLYING DOWN THE NEAR SIDE OF A DUNE IN A FLURRY OF MOTION AND SAND--
AND SUDDENLY, HAMAR KUR RECOGNIZES HIM:
BY THE ALABASTER HIPS OF YENAGRA!
IT IS CONAN, THE KOZAK!
SLAY HIM, MEN, AND KING YEZDIGERD WILL FILL YOUR HELMETS WITH GOLD! HE--UNNNGH!
TARIM'S BLOOD! HE THROWS HIS VERY MOUNT IN OUR PATH!
FOR A PRECIOUS INSTANT, HAMAR KUR'S FELLOW TURANIANS HESITATE--AWED BY THE MEMORY OF GORY AND TERRIBLE LEGENDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NAME OF CONAN:
THE BURNING OF KHAWARIZM--THE STORMING OF WALLED KHOROSUN--HIS WAR-CHIEFTAINSHIP OF THE FIERCE ZUAGIRS.*
AND THE GIANT CIMMERIAN MAKES FULL USE OF HIS ENEMIES' MOMENT OF INDECISION, THUNDERING DOWN UPON THEM LIKE A ONE-MAN AVALANCHE--
*AS LEADER OF THE KOZAKS, A DESERT OUTLAW HORDE, CONAN HARRIED THE OUTPOSTS OF THE TURANIAN EMPIRE MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, AS SEEN IN MANY ISSUES OF THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN.--ROY.
--TO THE DETRIMENT FIRST OF HAMAR KUR HIMSELF!
UNNGH!
KILL HIM! KILL HIM!
NOW, AT LAST, THE OTHER TWO SOLDIERS COUCH THEIR LANCES AND SPUR FURIOUSLY--BUT A SPLIT SECOND TOO LATE.
WITH THE FURY OF A SUDDEN THUNDERSTORM, CONAN IS UPON THEM--


--AND IN THE LIGHTNING-FLASH OF A SWORD, THE ODDS ON HORSEBACK FIRST ARE EVENED--
AAAAA
--THEN SHATTERED TOTALLY, AS THE REMAINING TURANIAN'S LANCE IS CUT INTO SPLINTERS--
--AND HE HIMSELF IS HURLED FROM HIS SADDLE BY SHEER IMPACT.
MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, HAMAR KUR HAS REGAINED HIS FEET.
ONCE, YEARS AGO, HE WAS LEADER OF A TROOP OF CAVALRY WHICH CONAN, AS LEADER OF THE KOZAKS, ROUTED IN AMBUSH ON THE YELBA RIVER.
DEMOTED TO A COMMON SOLDIER IN THE FRONTIER GUARDS IN CONSEQUENCE, HE HAS BURNED EVER SINCE FOR REVENGE.
AND THIS DAY AS HE SKILLFULLY THRUSTS THE SHAFT OF HIS LANCE BETWEEN THE LEGS OF CONAN'S HORSE--
--HE FEELS HIS PRAYERS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED!
WHNIIII
BY YMIR!

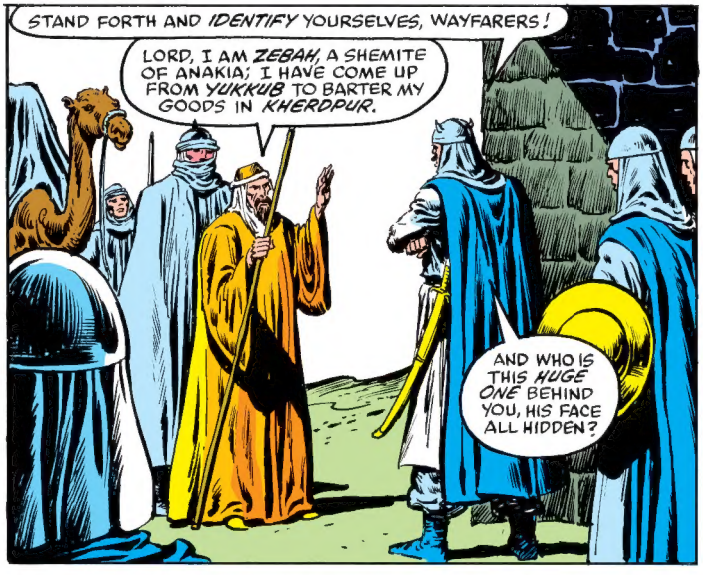
WITH THE PRACTICED EASE OF THE HARDENED MERCENARY, HOWEVER, THE BARBARIAN KING HAS THROWN HIMSELF CLEAR-- TO RISE, SWORD STILL IN HAND--
--EVEN AS, WITH COLD BLUE EYES SLITTED, HE WATCHES HIS TWO SURVIVING FOEMEN SLINK TOWARD HIM, ONE FROM EITHER SIDE.
AGAINST SUCH TACTICS, THERE IS NO GOOD DEFENSE--
--AND SO, CONAN DOES NOT DEFEND-- BUT ATTACKS!
URRGKK
THE FIRST TURANIAN IS BREATHING HIS LAST BEFORE HE KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED--
NOR IS THE CIMMERIAN UNAWARE THAT HAMAR KUR WILL BE AIMING A SCIMITAR AT HIS BACK--
--A BLOW HE SCARCELY MANAGES TO CATCH UPON HIS OWN STRAIGHT SWORD.
A MOMENT LATER, THE CORUSCATING DANCE OF DOOM IS ENDED--
YYYYYYY
--THOUGH CONAN WOULD NOT HAVE THOUGHT HAMAR KUR TO HAVE SUCH A HIGH-PITCHED DEATH-SHRIEK IN HIM.

THEN, EVEN AS HE FINISHES WIPING HIS SWORD ON HIS ENEMY'S SASH--
PRAISE BE TO KEMOSH, WHO HAS ANSWERED MY PRAYERS!--
WHO THE DEVIL--?
I AM YAR ALLAL OF THE DUALI TRIBE--
--AND I REJOICE THAT YOU HAVE RETURNED TO US, HAWK OF THE DESERT--
--AND HAVE SENT THESE DOGS TO THE FLOORS OF HELL!--PTUI!
DO I KNOW YOU, FELLOW?
KNOW ME?
WHY, I WAS ONE OF THOSE YOU LED TO PLUNDER, SO MANY YEARS AGO.
A DESERT-FOX WOULD SOONER FORGET ITS HOLE, THAN A ZUAGIR WOULD FORGET YOU, WHO WERE OUR GREAT WAR-CHIEF!
THERE WILL BE FEASTING AND DANCING IN THE VILLAGES, WHEN THEY KNOW YOU HAVE RETURNED, O HAWK!
TELL ME, THEN--WHAT'S AFOOT IN THE DESERT?
HOW DID YOU FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE ACCURSED HYRKANIANS?
ALAS, I WAS RIDING IN HASTE AND ALONE WHEN THESE DOGS CAUGHT ME.
THEY WERE BRINGING ME BACK TO FORT WAKLA FOR QUESTIONING--AND DEATH.
WHY YOUR HURRY? AND WHY WERE YOU RIDING ALONE, WHEN THESE HILLS SWARM WITH TURANIAN PATROLS?
A TERRIBLE MISFORTUNE HAS STRUCK THE DUALI TRIBE, MY LORD.
SATE YOUR THIRST--AND EAT, WHILE YOU TELL ME OF IT, YAR ALLAL.
FOR DAYS, WE LAY IN WAIT IN THE RUINS OF THE GHARAT TEMPLE, FIFTY LEAGUES SOUTH OF HERE...THAT WE MIGHT CAPTURE THE LADY THANARA AND HER WEALTH, IN AN EAST-BOUND CARAVAN.
WHO'S THIS THANARA? I DON'T--
YOU HAVE BEEN AWAY LONG, O HAWK...

SHE IS A COURTESAN OF MAYPUR, FAMED FOR HER BEAUTY AND RICHES--AND FURTHERMORE, HIGH IN THE FAVOR OF TURAN'S KING YEZDIGERD.
COULD WE BUT CAPTURE HER, A FABULOUS RANSOM WOULD BE OURS--AS WELL AS THE SPOILS FROM THE CAMEL TRAIN.
SO YOU LAY IN AMBUSH FOR HER?
AYE, AND ONE DAY HER CARAVAN CAME INTO VIEW, OR SO IT SEEMED.
WE EXPECTED AN EASY CONQUEST OF THE MERCHANTS AND THEIR RETAINERS...
BUT SUDDENLY, THE CARAVANERS THREW ASIDE THEIR KHALATS--AND MAILED LANCERS IN THE WHITE TURBANS OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD RUSHED AGAINST US--A HUNDRED STRONG!
A TRAP, THEN?
AYE! EVEN YIN ALLAL, MY FATHER, WAS TAKEN CAPTIVE--THOUGH MANY A TURANIAN FELL BENEATH DUALI SPEAR OR CURVED SWORD, AS WELL!
YIN ALLAL, YES--I REMEMBER HIM WELL, AS ONE OF MY STAUNCHEST SUPPORTERS WHEN I LED THE THREE UNITED ZUAGIR TRIBES!
IS YOUR FATHER ALIVE, THEN, SO FAR AS YOU KNOW?
AYE! BUT BY NOW, THE CARAVAN IS SAFELY WITHIN THE WALLS OF FORT WAKLA.
WE MUST RESCUE HIM, THEN.
O HAWK--YOU WOULD--?
AM I AN HYRKANIAN DOG, TO LEAVE AN OLD FRIEND UNAIDED IN THE HANDS OF HIS FOES?
CATCH YOURSELF A HORSE, YAR ALLAL--
--AND LEAD ME TO THE DUALI OASIS!
AND IF MY NAME IS NOT FORGOTTEN THERE--
--WE'LL PULL THE TURANIANS' BEARDS YET, BY CROM!

NIGHT: AND THE OASIS OF THE DUALI CAMP LIES ENFOLDED IN EBONY, STAR-SPRINKLED ARMS...
...AS RIDERS FROM THE NEIGHBORING KHAROYA AND QIRLATA TRIBES ARRIVE, HASTILY SUMMONED BY DUALI MESSENGERS WHO BROUGHT THE NEWS:
"A LEGEND HAS RETURNED!"
IT IS GOOD THAT THE THREE TRIBES CAN SET ASIDE THEIR SMALLER QUARRELS, MY FRIENDS.
FORT WAKLA CANNOT BE TAKEN BY A DIRECT ASSAULT, OR BY SIEGE-- SO WE MUST USE TRICKERY!
WE YIELD TO THE WISDOM OF CONAN, GREATEST WAR-CHIEF OF THE ZUAGIR, IN THIS OR ANY AGE.
GOOD! HERE, THEN, IS MY PLAN: FIFTY OF US, GARBED AS MERCHANTS, SLAVES, RETAINERS, AND CAMEL DRIVERS, SHALL TAKE A CARAVAN TO THE FORT, AS IF WE WERE ON THE ROAD TO KHERDPUR.
AT THE TWELFTH HOUR, WE SHALL CUT DOWN THE GUARDS AT THE GATE--OPEN THEM, AN LET IN THE HORDE.
OUR MAIN GOALS ARE THE BARRACKS, THE OFFICERS' QUARTERS, AND THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE.
WE SHALL PILLAGE, BURN, SACK, AND SLAY-- UNTIL THE STREETS RUN RED WITH TURANIAN BLOOD!
NOW, TO WORK, DOG-BROTHERS!
BEFORE SUNRISE, I WANT SUCH A CAMEL TRAIN AS WOULD MAKE ANY ZUAGIR'S MOUTH WATER!
IT SHALL BE DONE, O DESERT HAWK!
THE AMBUSH AT THE GHARAT TEMPLE MUST BE AVENGED!

Some days Later:
HAIL, THE FORT!
WE WOULD BEG ENTRANCE TO FORT WAKLA, STRONGHOLD OF THE NOBLE TURANIANS!


STAND FORTH AND IDENTIFY YOURSELVES, WAYFARERS!
LORD, I AM ZEBAH, A SHEMITE OF ANAKIA; I HAVE COME UP FROM YUKKUB TO BARTER MY GOODS IN KHERDPUR.
AND WHO IS THIS HUGE ONE BEHIND YOU, HIS FACE ALL HIDDEN?

LORD, HE IS MY PERSONAL SERVANT AND BODYGUARD--A STYGIAN, UNDER A VOW OF SILENCE.

BY ASHTORETH, IT WILL BE GOOD TO BE SAFELY WITHIN WALLS AGAIN, DESPITE ALL MY HIRED GUARDS.
YOUR PRECAUTIONS WERE WASTED, SHEMITE! JUST NOW, A WOMAN COULD RIDE UNMOLESTED ALONG THE CARAVAN TRAIL.
ONLY DAYS AGO, THE IMPERIAL GUARDS SMASHED A HOST OF DESERT NOMADS... EVEN CAPTURED THEIR CHIEFTAIN.
THAT IS INDEED GLORIOUS NEWS.

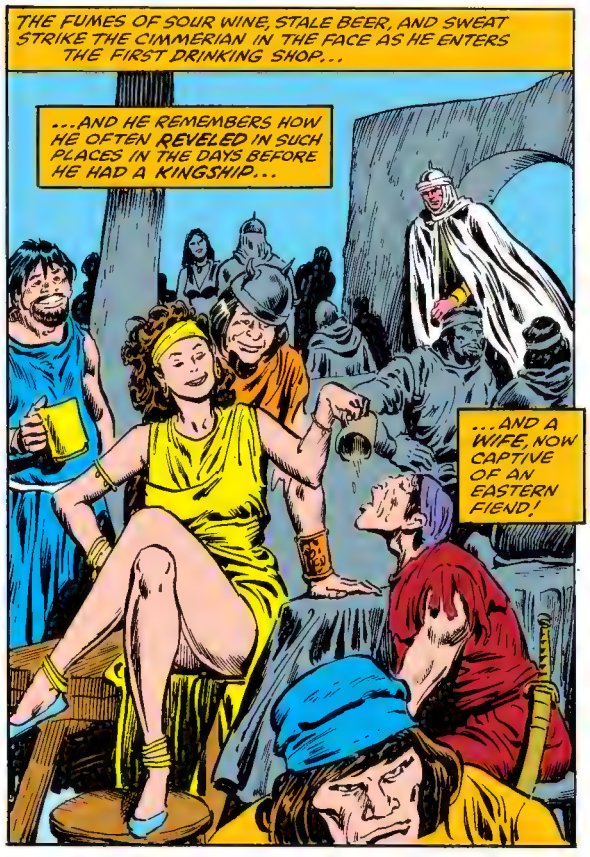
AYE! VEZIR SHAH HAS ORDERED US TO SLAY ANY ZUAGIR CAUGHT BY OUR PATROLS.
BY THE TIME YOU RETURN FROM YUKKUB, THE DESERT WILL BE SAFER STILL.
I WILL BURN AN OFFERING TO BEL AS A MEASURE OF MY GRATITUDE.

WITHIN THE FORT, THE NEWCOMERS FIND A SMALL CITY LAID OUT BEFORE THEM...
AND THEY MAKE FOR QUARTERS BY THE WESTERN WALL, RESERVED FOR VISITING CARAVANS.

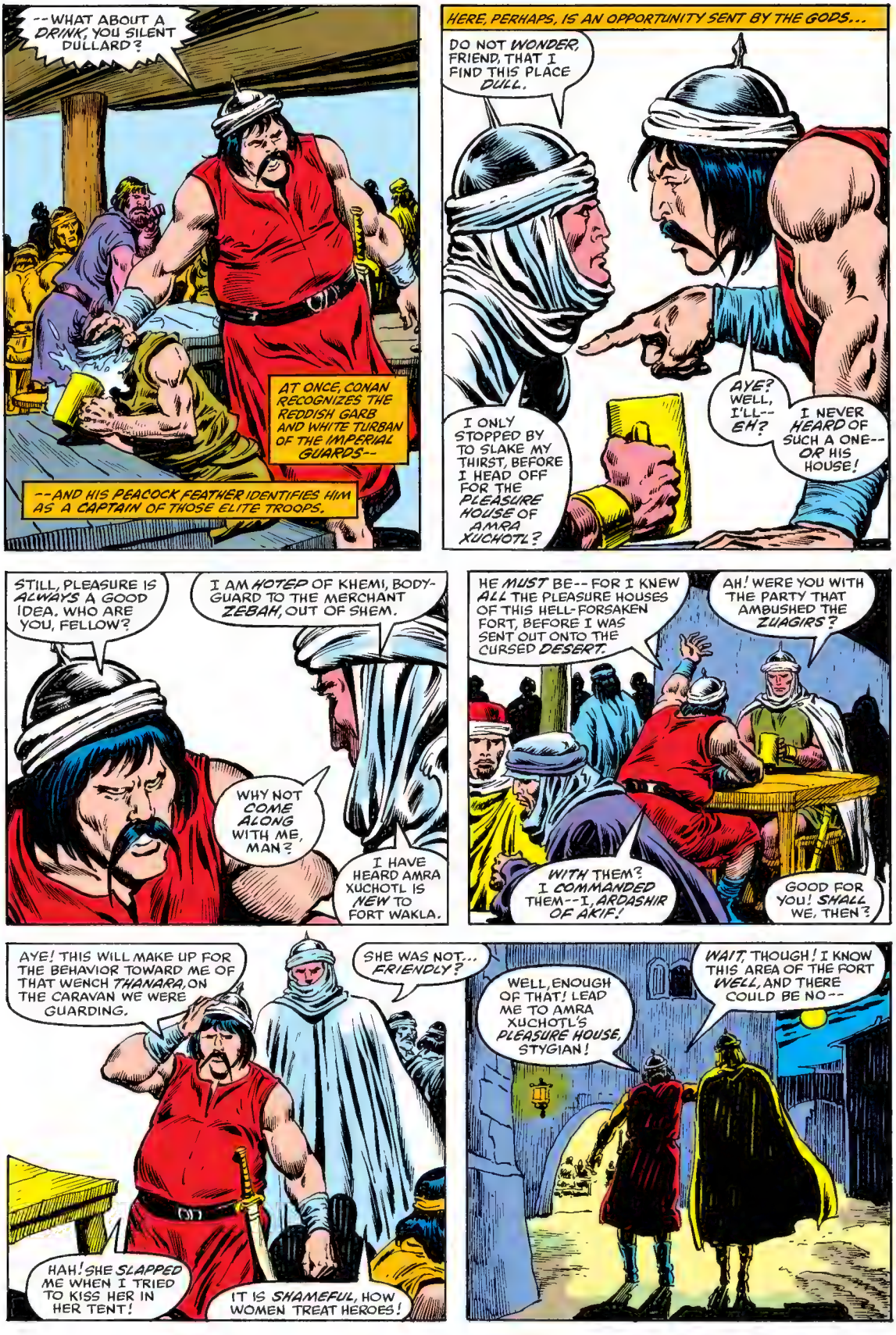
THERE, WITH TWO HOURS YET TO GO BEFORE THE APPOINTED TIME, AN ARGUMENT RAGES...
...BUT, CONAN, SHOULD WE NOT ALL STAY HERE, UNSUSPECTED, UNTIL THE HOUR ARRIVES?
BY MITRA'S MANTLE, WE WILL DO AS I HAVE SAID!
WE HAVE LOCATED THE QUARTERS OF THE OFFICERS AND COMMON SOLDIERS... BUT WE KNOW NOT HOW MANY TROOPS ARE QUARTERED THERE.

IN THE TAVERN DISTRICT, THERE WILL BE SCORES OF DRUNKEN SOLDIERS OFF DUTY.
FROM ONE OF THEM, I SHALL GET THE INFORMATION I WANT--IF I MUST WRING IT FROM HIM LIKE A SODDEN CLOTH!
THEN, DO AS YOU WILL, O HAWK.

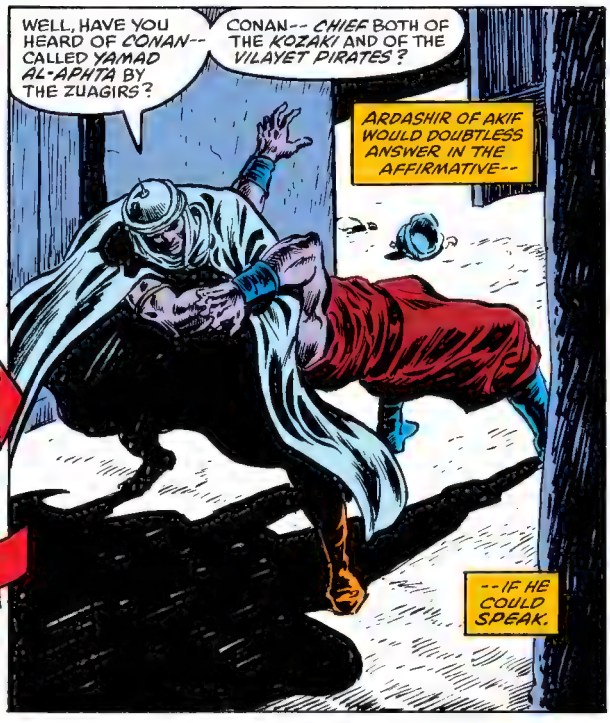
HIS IRON DETERMINATION PREVAILING, CONAN STRIDES OFF, HIS FACE STILL HIDDEN.
NO USE UPSETTING THEIR CAREFULLY-LAID PLANS BY LETTING SOME TURANIAN WITH A LONG MEMORY RECOGNIZE HIM...!

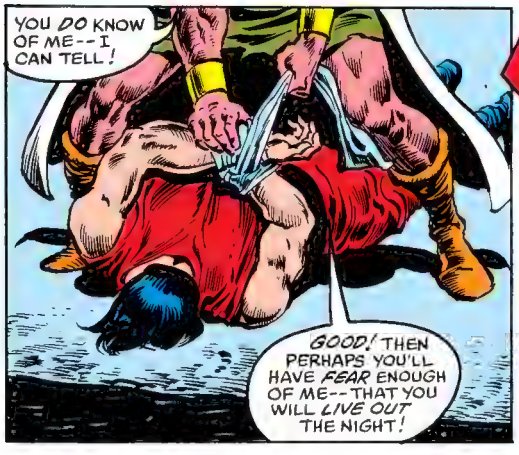

THE FUMES OF SOUR WINE, STALE BEER, AND SWEAT STRIKE THE CIMMERIAN IN THE FACE AS HE ENTERS THE FIRST DRINKING SHOP...
...AND HE REMEMBERS HOW HE OFTEN REVELED IN SUCH PLACES IN THE DAYS BEFORE HE HAD A KINGSHIP...
...AND A WIFE, NOW CAPTIVE OF AN EASTERN FIEND!

SEEKING OUT A SECLUDED TABLE, HE NURSES A TANKARD OF BEER FOR A TIME, AND BEGINS TO RELAX.
NERVOUSNESS SELDOM ASSAILS HIM, BUT HIS SENSES HAVE BEEN ON EDGE SINCE HE ENTERED THE ENEMY'S LAIR...
HEY, YOU!--


--WHAT ABOUT A DRINK, YOU SILENT DULLARD?
AT ONCE, CONAN RECOGNIZES THE REDDISH GARB AND WHITE TURBAN OF THE IMPERIAL GUARDS--
--AND HIS PEACOCK FEATHER IDENTIFIES HIM AS A CAPTAIN OF THOSE ELITE TROOPS.
HERE, PERHAPS, IS AN OPPORTUNITY SENT BY THE GODS...
DO NOT WONDER, FRIEND, THAT I FIND THIS PLACE DULL.
I ONLY STOPPED BY TO SLAKE MY THIRST, BEFORE I HEAD OFF FOR THE PLEASURE HOUSE OF AMRA XUCHOTL?
AYE? WELL, I'LL-- EH?
I NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A ONE-- OR HIS HOUSE!
STILL, PLEASURE IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA. WHO ARE YOU, FELLOW?
I AM HOTEP OF KHEMI, BODY-GUARD TO THE MERCHANT ZEBAH, OUT OF SHEM.
WHY NOT COME ALONG WITH ME, MAN?
I HAVE HEARD AMRA XUCHOTL IS NEW TO FORT WAKLA.
HE MUST BE-- FOR I KNEW ALL THE PLEASURE HOUSES OF THIS HELL-FORSAKEN FORT, BEFORE I WAS SENT OUT ONTO THE CURSED DESERT.
AH! WERE YOU WITH THE PARTY THAT AMBUSHED THE ZUAGIRS?
WITH THEM? I COMMANDED THEM--I, ARDASHIR OF AKIF!
GOOD FOR YOU! SHALL WE, THEN?
AYE! THIS WILL MAKE UP FOR THE BEHAVIOR TOWARD ME OF THAT WENCH THANARA, ON THE CARAVAN WE WERE GUARDING.
SHE WAS NOT... FRIENDLY?
HAH! SHE SLAPPED ME WHEN I TRIED TO KISS HER IN HER TENT!
IT IS SHAMEFUL, HOW WOMEN TREAT HEROES!
WELL, ENOUGH OF THAT! LEAD ME TO AMRA XUCHOTL'S PLEASURE HOUSE, STYGIAN!
WAIT, THOUGH! I KNOW THIS AREA OF THE FORT WELL, AND THERE COULD BE NO--

URRGGK
YOU ASKED MY NAME, EASTERN DOG--

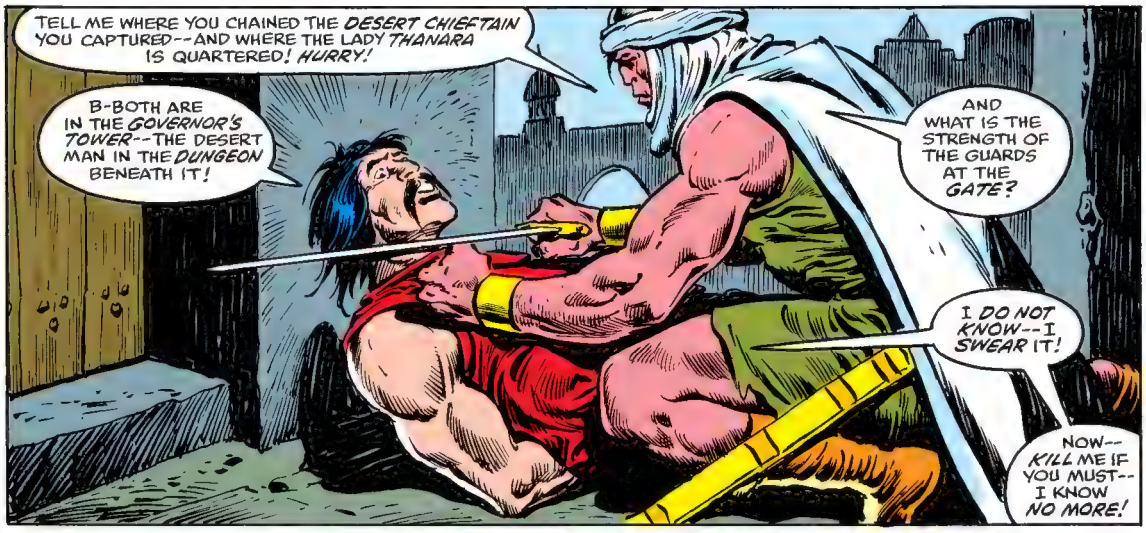

WELL, HAVE YOU HEARD OF CONAN-- CALLED YAMAD AL-APHTA BY THE ZUAGIRS?
CONAN-- CHIEF BOTH OF THE KOZAKI AND OF THE VILAYET PIRATES?
ARDASHIR OF AKIF WOULD DOUBTLESS ANSWER IN THE AFFIRMATIVE--
--IF HE COULD SPEAK.


YOU DO KNOW OF ME--I CAN TELL!
GOOD! THEN PERHAPS YOU'LL HAVE FEAR ENOUGH OF ME--THAT YOU WILL LIVE OUT THE NIGHT!

NOW, I WILL HAVE INFORMATION FROM YOU--OR YOUR PASSING WILL BE SLOW AND UNPLEASANT.
SOME OF THOSE YOU KILLED A FEW DAYS PAST WERE FRIENDS OF MINE, FROM THE OLD DAYS.
Y-YOU ARE REALLY CONAN? THEY SAY YOU WERE A DEMON...!
PERHAPS I AM. AT LEAST, I'VE POWER ENOUGH TO SEND YOU TO HELL, SLOWLY.

NOW, TELL ME THE STRENGTH OF THE GARRISON HERE, OR--
IT IS BEST, PERHAPS, THAT WE DO NOT REPEAT CONAN'S DIRE AND SINCERE THREATS... THOUGH IT IS PROBABLY LESS THE FEAR OF TORTURE THAN THE SUPERSTITIOUS DREAD IN WHICH THE MEMORY OF CONAN OF THE ZUAGIRS IS HELD THAT LOOSENS ARDASHIR'S TONGUE...
WELL? I HAVE LITTLE TIME, MAN OF AKIF-- AND YOU, EVEN LESS!

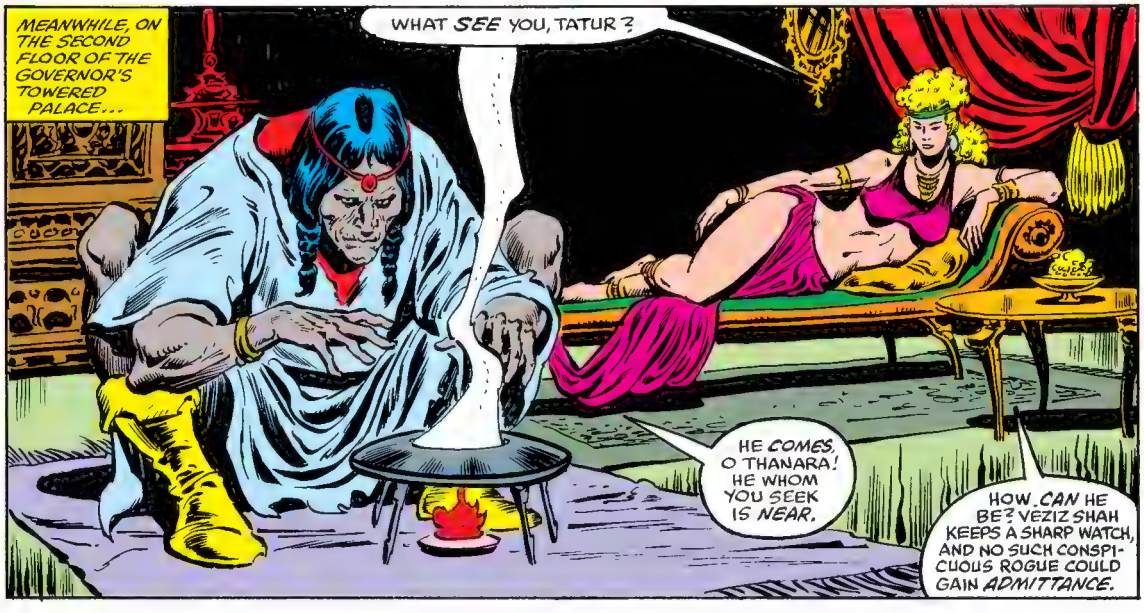
TH-THE REGULAR GARRISON OF CAVALRY IS TWELVE HUNDRED STRONG-- AND QUARTERED IN THE BARRACKS OF THE MAIN GATE--
--WHILE THE HUNDRED MEN OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD ARE SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE CITY IN TEMPORARY QUARTERS.
NOW-- I--

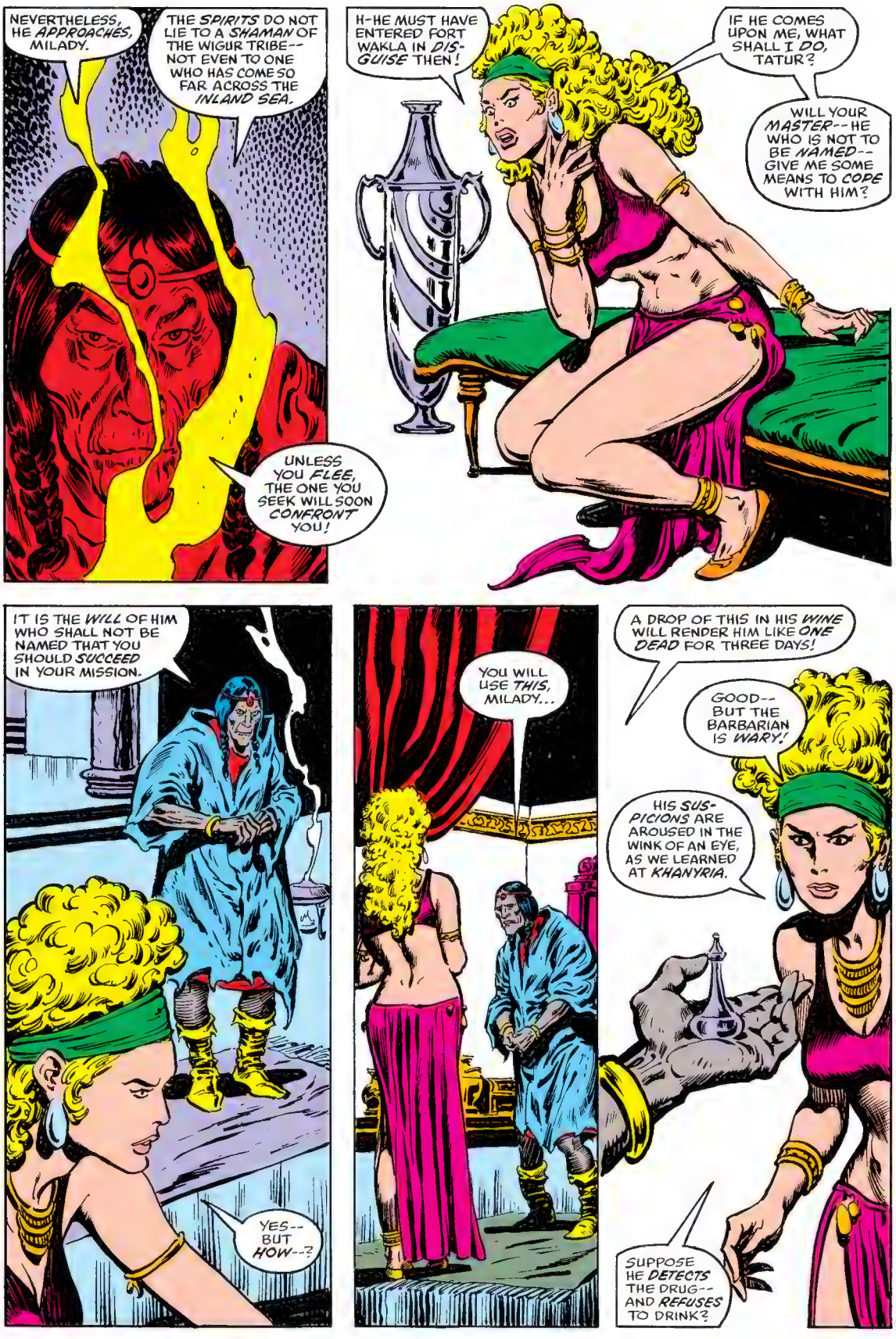

TELL ME WHERE YOU CHAINED THE DESERT CHIEFTAIN YOU CAPTURED--AND WHERE THE LADY THANARA IS QUARTERED! HURRY!
B-BOTH ARE IN THE GOVERNOR'S TOWER--THE DESERT MAN IN THE DUNGEON BENEATH IT!
AND WHAT IS THE STRENGTH OF THE GUARDS AT THE GATE?
I DO NOT KNOW--I SWEAR IT!
NOW--KILL ME IF YOU MUST--I KNOW NO MORE!

I MUST BE GROWING SOFT!
TIME WAS, I'D HAVE CUT YOUR THROAT AFTER QUESTIONING YOU.

BUT, NO NEED OF THAT, ARDASHIR OF AKIF--

--THE ZUAGIRS WILL NO DOUBT TAKE CARE OF THAT WHEN THEY FIND YOU!
A GLANCE AT THE MOON TELLS CONAN THE TWELFTH HOUR IS NEAR, AS HE STRIDES OFF, FULL OF THE KNOWLEDGE HE HAS SOUGHT.

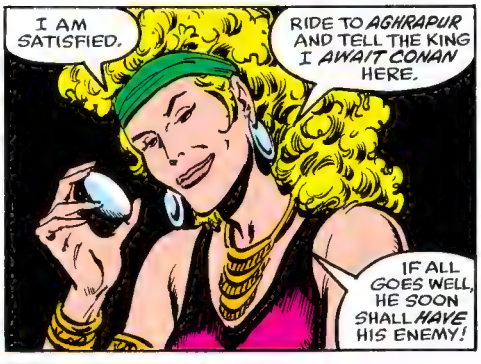

MEANWHILE, ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE GOVERNOR'S TOWERED PALACE...
WHAT SEE YOU, TATUR?
HE COMES, O THANARA! HE WHOM YOU SEEK IS NEAR.
HOW CAN HE BE? VEZIZ SHAH KEEPS A SHARP WATCH, AND NO SUCH CONSPICUOUS ROGUE COULD GAIN ADMITTANCE.

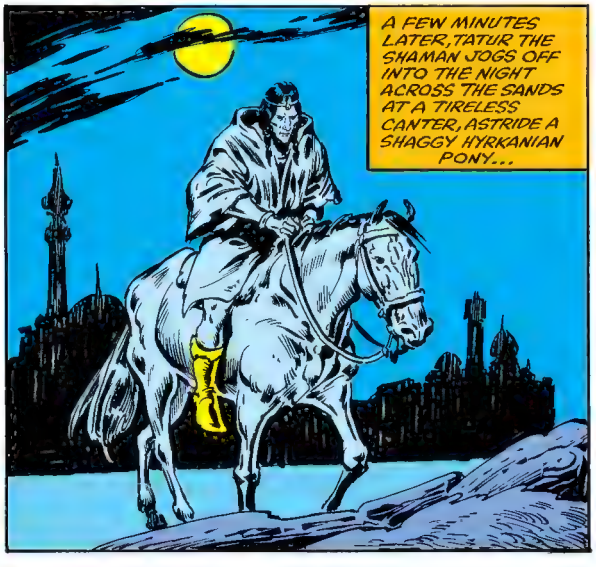

NEVERTHELESS, HE APPROACHES, MILADY.
THE SPIRITS DO NOT LIE TO A SHAMAN OF THE WIGUR TRIBE-- NOT EVEN TO ONE WHO HAS COME SO FAR ACROSS THE INLAND SEA.
UNLESS YOU FLEE, THE ONE YOU SEEK WILL SOON CONFRONT YOU!
H-HE MUST HAVE ENTERED FORT WAKLA IN DISGUISE THEN!
IF HE COMES UPON ME, WHAT SHALL I DO, TATUR?
WILL YOUR MASTER--HE WHO IS NOT TO BE NAMED--GIVE ME SOME MEANS TO COPE WITH HIM?
IT IS THE WILL OF HIM WHO SHALL NOT BE NAMED THAT YOU SHOULD SUCCEED IN YOUR MISSION.
YES-- BUT HOW--?
YOU WILL USE THIS, MILADY...
A DROP OF THIS IN HIS WINE WILL RENDER HIM LIKE ONE DEAD FOR THREE DAYS!
GOOD-- BUT THE BARBARIAN IS WARY!
HIS SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED IN THE WINK OF AN EYE, AS WE LEARNED AT KHANYRIA.
SUPPOSE HE DETECTS THE DRUG-- AND REFUSES TO DRINK?

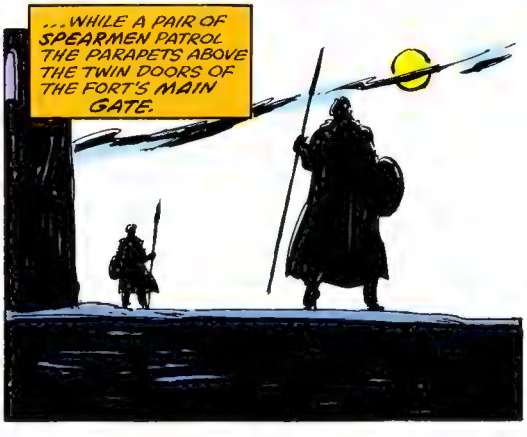
BE NOT AFRAID, MILADY.
IN THAT CASE, THE CONTENTS OF THIS LEATHER POUCH WILL LAY HIM LOW-- IF HE BUT BREATHE IT.

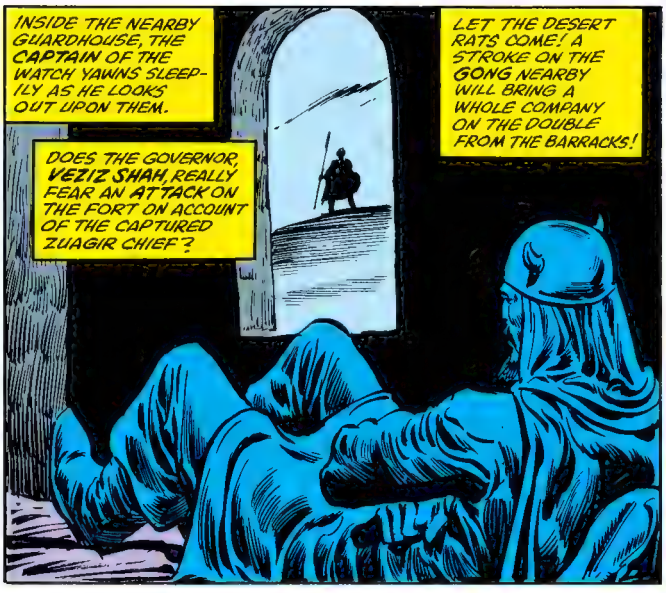
WHAT IS IT, SHAMAN?
POLLEN OF THE YELLOW LOTUS OF KHITAI.
USE IT ONLY AS A LAST RESORT, FOR IT WOULD AFFECT YOU, TOO, IF YOU BREATHE IT...
...AND TOO DEEP A BREATH OF IT CAN KILL.

GOOD, BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH! I WANT A LAST-MINUTE MEANS OF ESCAPE... AND YOUR MASTER OWES IT TO ME FOR PAST SERVICES.
HE WHO IS NOT TO BE NAMED SAID TRULY YOU ARE A SHARP BARGAINER.
TAKE THIS TRANS-LUCENT EGG, THEN.
BREAK THIS IN YOUR HOUR OF NEED-- AND HELP WILL COME TO YOU FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS.


I AM SATISFIED.
RIDE TO AGHRAPUR AND TELL THE KING I AWAIT CONAN HERE.
IF ALL GOES WELL, HE SOON SHALL HAVE HIS ENEMY!


A FEW MINUTES LATER, TATUR THE SHAMAN JOGS OFF INTO THE NIGHT ACROSS THE SANDS AT A TIRELESS CANTER, ASTRIDE A SHAGGY HYRKANIAN PONY...

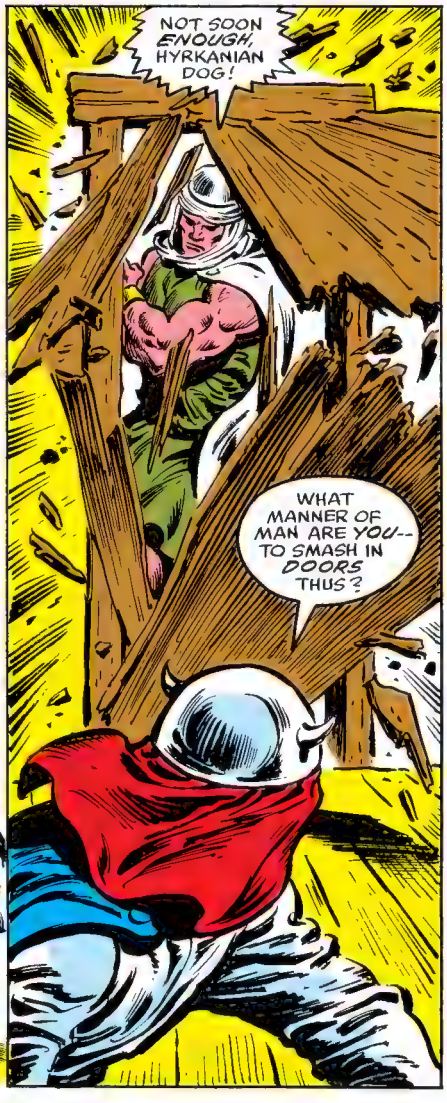

...WHILE A PAIR OF SPEARMEN PATROL THE PARAPETS ABOVE THE TWIN DOORS OF THE FORT'S MAIN GATE.

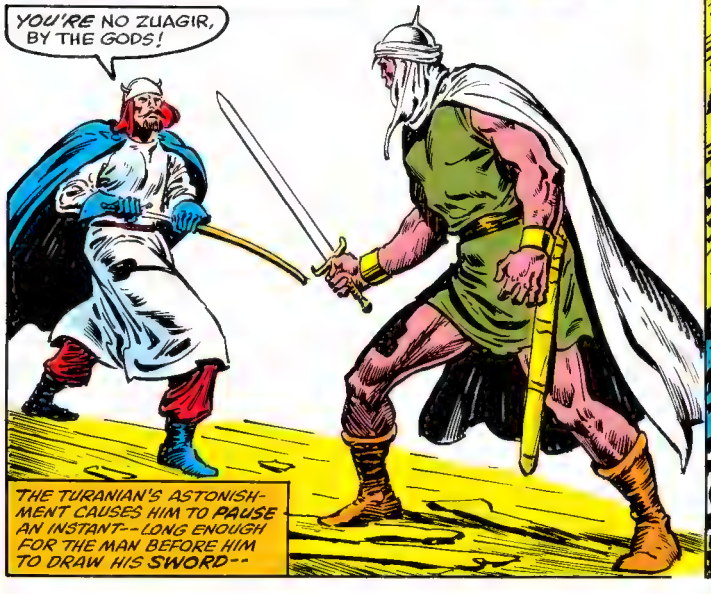

INSIDE THE NEARBY GUARDHOUSE, THE CAPTAIN OF THE WATCH YAWNS SLEEPILY AS HE LOOKS OUT UPON THEM.
DOES THE GOVERNOR, VEZIR SHAH, REALLY FEAR AN ATTACK ON THE FORT ON ACCOUNT OF THE CAPTURED ZUAGIR CHIEF?
LET THE DESERT RATS COME! A STROKE ON THE GONG NEARBY WILL BRING A WHOLE COMPANY ON THE DOUBLE FROM THE BARRACKS!

FOR A MOMENT, THE MOON IS OBSCURED BY CLOUDS-- AND AS IT COMES OUT AGAIN, A SHOCKING SIGHT MEETS AKEB MAAN'S STARTLED EYES...
WHAT IN ERLIK'S NAME--?
FOR NOW, INSTEAD OF SPIRED HELMETS AND MANTLES--

--THE MEN ATOP THE WALL WEAR BANDED KAFFIAS AND KHALATS.

ZUAGIRS, BY TARIM!
I'LL SOUND THE ALARM AND SOON--


NOT SOON ENOUGH, HYRKANIAN DOG!
WHAT MANNER OF MAN ARE YOU-- TO SMASH IN DOORS THUS?


YOU'RE NO ZUAGIR, BY THE GODS!
THE TURANIAN'S ASTONISHMENT CAUSES HIM TO PAUSE AN INSTANT--LONG ENOUGH FOR THE MAN BEFORE HIM TO DRAW HIS SWORD--

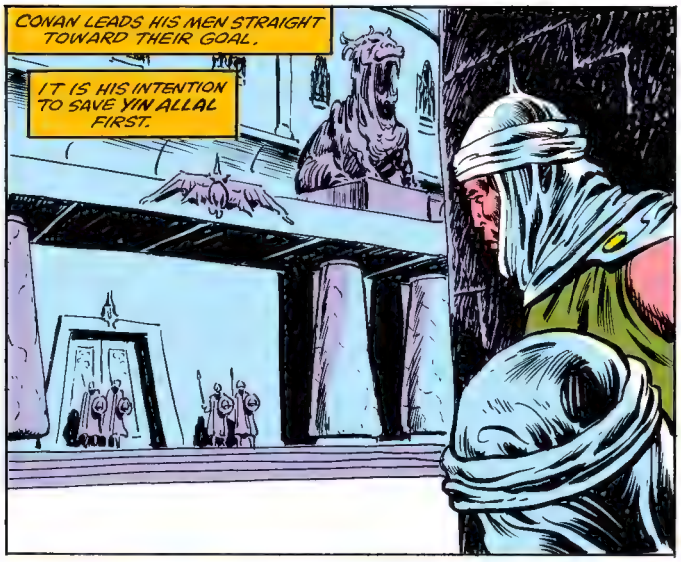
--AND ATTACK WITH THE SWIFTNESS OF DESERT LIGHTNING!
YOU ASKED ME WHO I WAS, JACKAL...
I AM CONAN--
--AYE, EVEN THE SAME YOU'RE THINKING OF, AS YOUR WIDENED EYES DO SHOW ME--
--AND I THOUGHT IT FITTING THAT A MAN KNOW THE NAME--
AAAGK
--OF THE ONE WHO SENDS HIM TO VALHALLA!

CONAN, HOWEVER, WASTES NO TIME IN GLOATING OVER THE UNMOVING CORPSE.
ANY MOMENT NOW, AN INQUISITIVE GUARDSMAN MIGHT POKE HIS HEAD THROUGH A BARRACKS WINDOW, OR A BELATED CITIZEN MIGHT COME WANDERING BY.

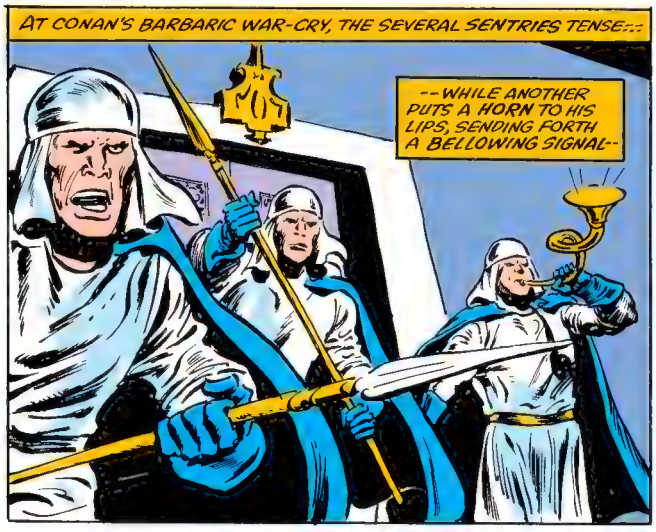
WITHIN SECONDS, THE BIG IRON-SHEATHED DOORS ARE OPENING--
--AND THROUGH THEM POURS A SWIFT AND SILENT-FOOTED STREAM OF WHITE-ROBED NOMADS!

IN SWIFT, LOW-SPOKEN WORDS, CONAN ISSUES HIS ORDERS...
TWO MEN WITH TORCHES--SET THE BARRACKS AFIRE!
BURN AND SLAY, AND TAKE ANY SPOIL AND CAPTIVES YOU WANT-- BUT KEEP TOGETHER!
THREE HUNDRED ARCHERS--PLACE YOURSELVES TO MOW DOWN THE SOLDIERS AS THEY POUR OUT!
DO NOT BREAK UP INTO BANDS SMALLER THAN TWENTY.

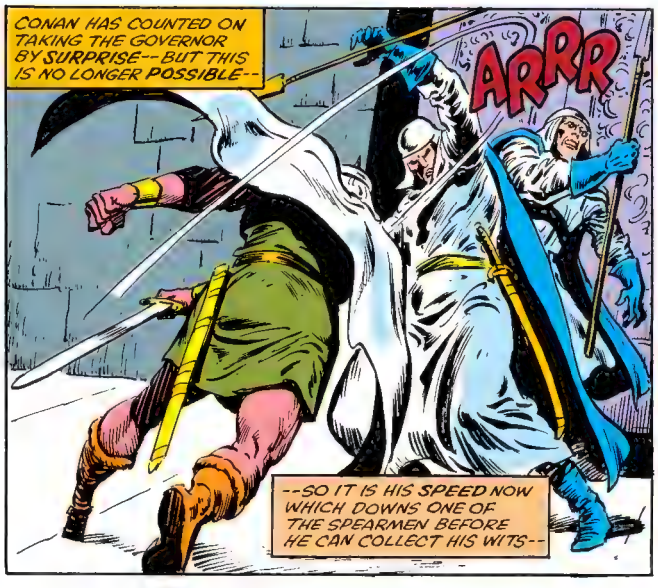
THABIT--BRING YOUR FIFTY WITH ME.
I AM FOR THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE!


CONAN LEADS HIS MEN STRAIGHT TOWARD THEIR GOAL.
IT IS HIS INTENTION TO SAVE YIN ALLAL FIRST.

AND BESIDES, HE HAS BEEN INTRIGUED BY TALES OF THE BEAUTIFUL COURTESAN CALLED THANARA...
HII-YAAAH!


AT CONAN'S BARBARIC WAR-CRY, THE SEVERAL SENTRIES TENSE::
--WHILE ANOTHER PUTS A HORN TO HIS LIPS, SENDING FORTH A BELLOWING SIGNAL--

UNNNGN--!
--WHICH IS CUT SHORT BY WELL-AIMED ZUAGIR ARROWS.


CONAN HAS COUNTED ON TAKING THE GOVERNOR BY SURPRISE--BUT THIS IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE--
ARRR
--SO IT IS HIS SPEED NOW WHICH DOWNS ONE OF THE SPEARMEN BEFORE HE CAN COLLECT HIS WITS--

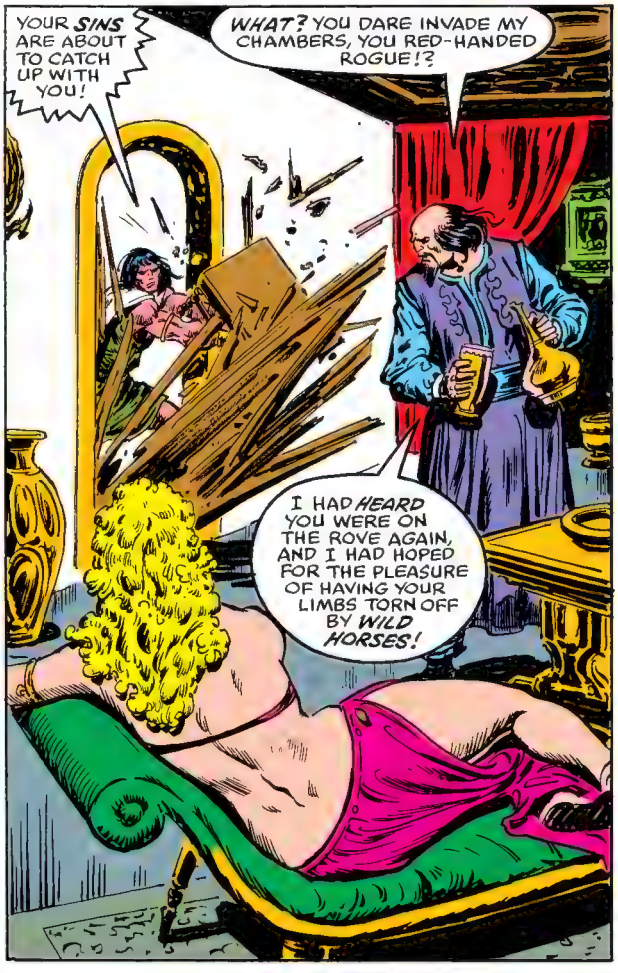
--AND A SECOND MAN'S SWIFTLY-AIMED SWORD STROKE--

--IS NO MORE EFFECTIVE, EITHER AT SLAYING THE INTRUDER, OR AT PRESERVING HIS OWN LIFE.
GNUNG
ROUSED NOW TO A VICIOUS LUST FOR KILLING, CONAN THRUSTS AGAINST THE COPPER DOOR, WHICH YIELDS BEFORE HIS MASSIVE SHOULDERS...
THIS WAY, BROTHERS!
TEN OF YOU STAY HERE-- THE REST, FOLLOW ME!
ISHTAR'S GIRDLE! MORE WHITE-TURBANS! *
*TURANIAN SLANG FOR THE IMPERIAL GUARDSMEN. --ROY.
DEATH TO THE INTERLOPERS!
THERE'LL BE DEATH DEALT HERE THIS NIGHT, SURELY ENOUGH-- BUT IT'S WE WHO'LL BE THE REAPERS!
MANY A CURVED KNIFE OR SHORT-ENED SPEAR FINDS ITS MARK IN TURANIAN VITALS...
BUT THE FLASHING SCIMITARS OF THE WORLD-CONQUERING HYRKANIANS ALSO TAKE A HEAVY TOLL.
WITHIN MINUTES, THE BATTLE IS ENDED...
I'M FOR THE SECOND FLOOR!
TEN OF YOU-- SEARCH FOR THE KEYS TO THE DUNGEON, AND FREE YIN ALLAL--

--WHILE I PAY THE GOVERNOR A VISIT!
WE SHALL DO AS YOU SAY, YAMAD AL-APHTA.

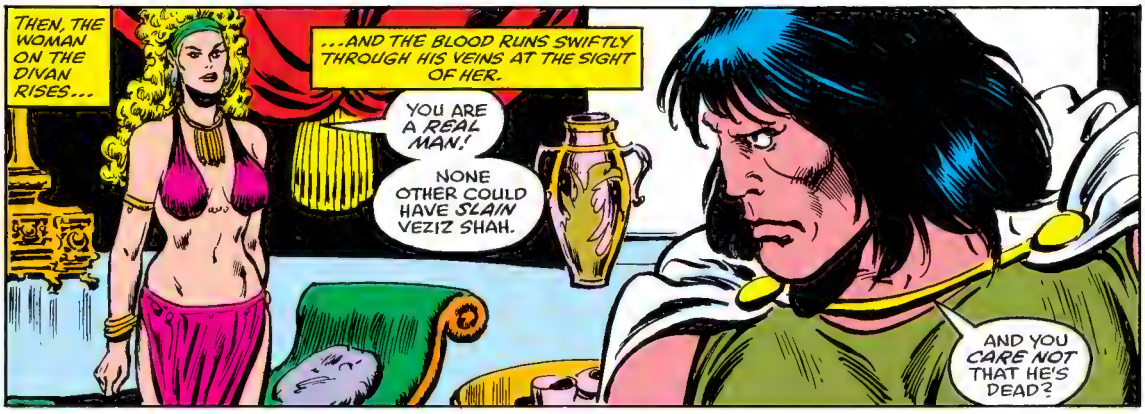
IT TAKES LITTLE OF CONAN'S TRACKING INSTINCT TO FIND THE QUARTERS OF VEZIZ SHAH.
HE BUT SEEKS OUT THE MOST INTRICATELY-DECORATED DOOR, WHICH IN TURN MUST LEAD INTO THE MOST GRACIOUSLY APPOINTED APARTMENTS--

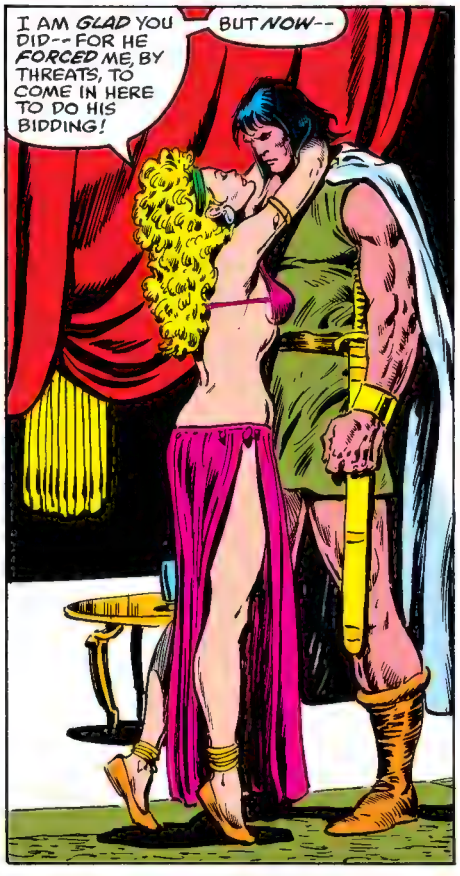
--AND THAT, OF COURSE, MUST BELONG TO THE LORD OF THIS SPRAWLING PALACE!
AWAKEN IF YOU SLEEP, VEZIZ SHAH--

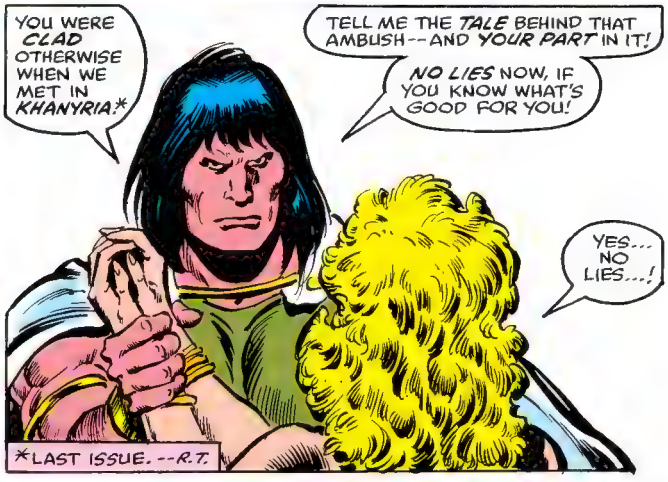

YOUR SINS ARE ABOUT TO CATCH UP WITH YOU!
WHAT? YOU DARE INVADE MY CHAMBERS, YOU RED-HANDED ROGUE!?
I HAD HEARD YOU WERE ON THE ROVE AGAIN, AND I HAD HOPED FOR THE PLEASURE OF HAVING YOUR LIMBS TORN OFF BY WILD HORSES!

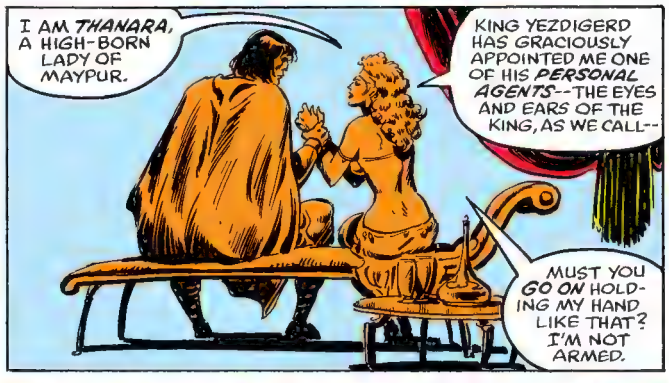
BUT, AS IT IS--!
EVEN AS VEZIZ SHAH WHIPS OUT HIS SWORD, CONAN RECOGNIZES THE WOMAN WITH HIM AS HER WHO HAD ACCOSTED HIM IN KHANYRIA--AND ALMOST LED HIM TO HIS DEATH.
WELL, SHE DID NOT WITNESS HIS FLOWING LIFEBLOOD THAT DAY--
--AND HE IS EQUALLY DETERMINED SHE SHALL NOT SEE IT THIS NIGHT!
YOU ARE A SKILLED SWORDSMAN, VEZIZ SHAH--FOR A CUSHION-SQUATTING GOVERNOR!
BUT, NO CIVILIZED FENDER CAN MATCH THE SKILL AND SPEED OF CONAN THE CIMMERIAN--HARDENED IN WARS AND BATTLES SINCE BOYHOOD AGAINST FOES FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.
THE PROWESS AT ARMS HE HAS WON AS A MERCENARY WOULD, BY ITSELF, HAVE MADE HIM MASTER OF ANY ORDINARY SWORDSMAN--FOR HIS LEARNING HAS BEEN POUNDED INTO HIS BRAIN IN ENDLESS, BLOODY STRIFE ON FAR BATTLEFIELDS...
IN ADDITION, HE RETAINS THE FLASHING, LIGHTNING-QUICK SPEED OF THE PRIMORDIAL BARBARIAN, UNSLOWED BY CIVILIZED COMFORT...
THUS, WITHIN MOMENTS, VEZIZ SHAH BEGINS TO TIRE--
--AND HIS EYES FILL WITH AN AWFUL FEAR!

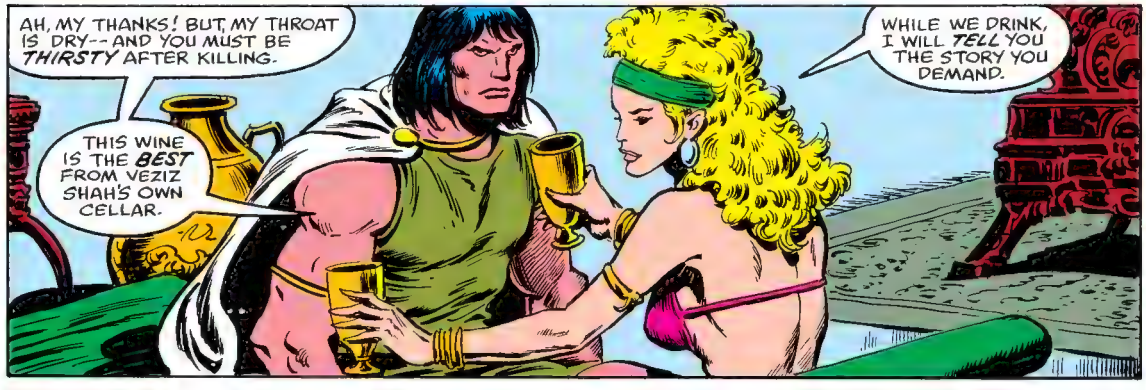
THUS IN SUDDEN DESPERATION--
YOUR SWORD-ARM'S STRENGTH IS FAR BETTER THAN YOUR THROWING ABILITY HYRKANIAN!
NEXT INSTANT, THE GOVERNOR IS RACING FOR THE FAR WALL--
--WHERE HIS URGENTLY QUESTING FINGERS PROBE THE SURFACE AS IF SEEKING THE SPRING TO OPEN A HIDDEN EXIT.
WHERE IS IT? WHERE--?
HE IS NOT DESTINED TO FIND IT.
DOG! DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU CAUGHT TEN OF MY AFGHULIS WHEN YOU COMMANDED A SQUADRON IN SECUNDERAM?
÷URRGGH--!÷
AND HOW YOU SENT ME THEIR PICKLED HEADS IN JARS, WITH WISHES FOR A HEARTY REPAST?
YOUR TIME HAS COME, VEZIZ SHAH!--
GGAAAA*
EVEN ABOVE THE TURANIAN'S GURGLING SCREAM, CONAN CAN HEAR HIS SPINE SNAP LIKE A DRY TWIG...
AND THEN, A LIFELESS CORPSE FLOPS TO THE FLOOR.


THEN, THE WOMAN ON THE DIVAN RISES...
...AND THE BLOOD RUNS SWIFTLY THROUGH HIS VEINS AT THE SIGHT OF HER.
YOU ARE A REAL MAN!
NONE OTHER COULD HAVE SLAIN VEZIZ SHAH.
AND YOU CARE NOT THAT HE'S DEAD?

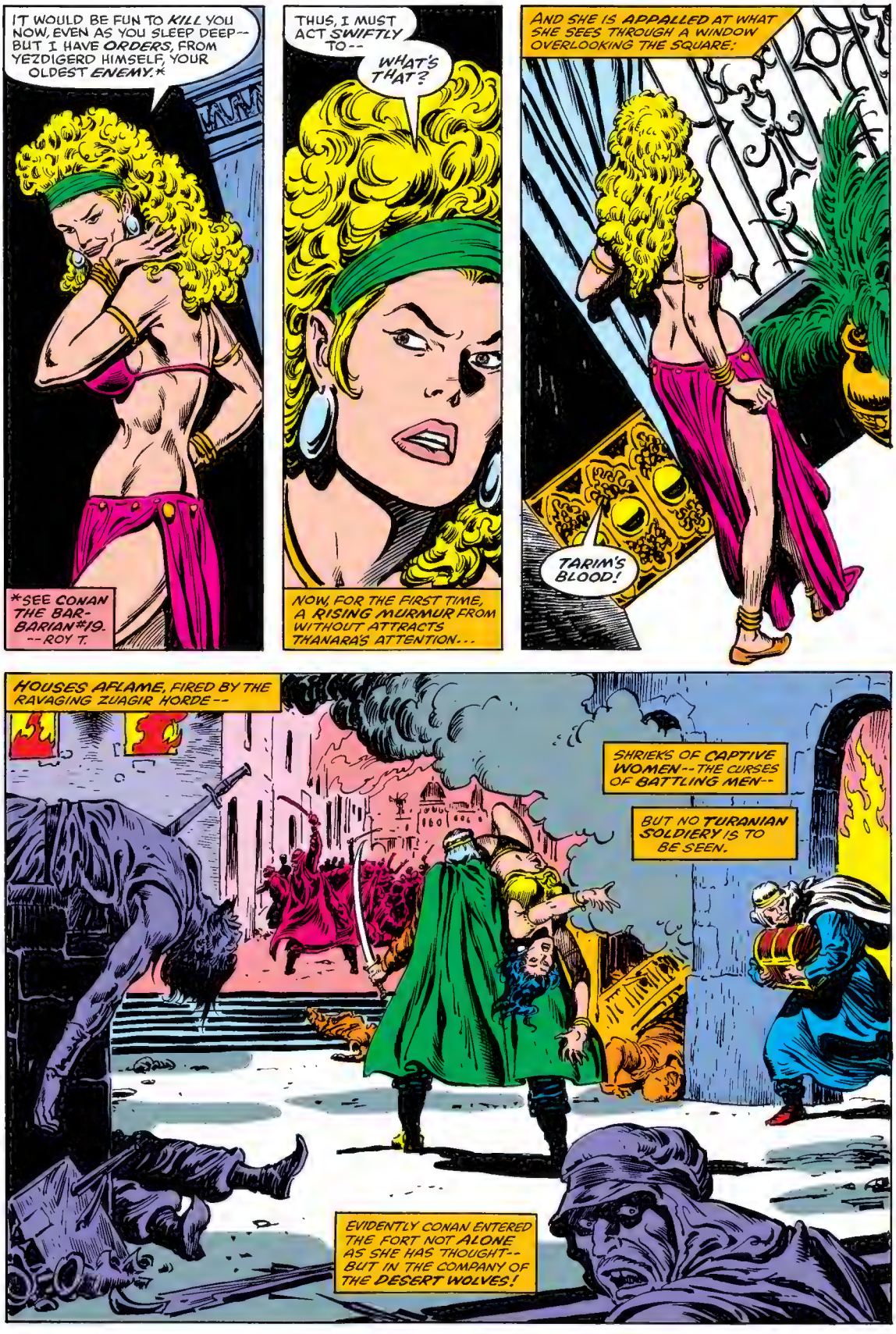

I AM GLAD YOU DID--FOR HE FORCED ME, BY THREATS, TO COME IN HERE TO DO HIS BIDDING!
BUT NOW--

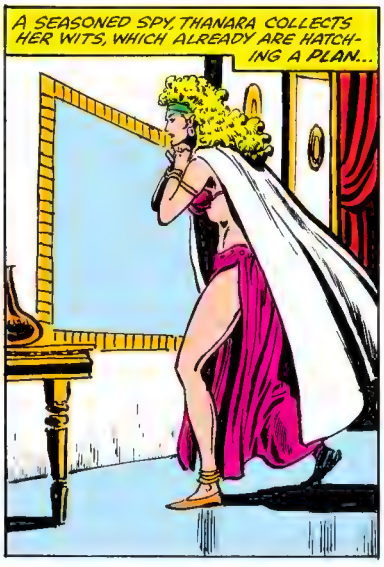

YOU WERE CLAD OTHERWISE WHEN WE MET IN KHANYRIA.*
TELL ME THE TALE BEHIND THAT AMBUSH--AND YOUR PART IN IT!
NO LIES NOW, IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU!
YES... NO LIES...!
*LAST ISSUE. --R.T.

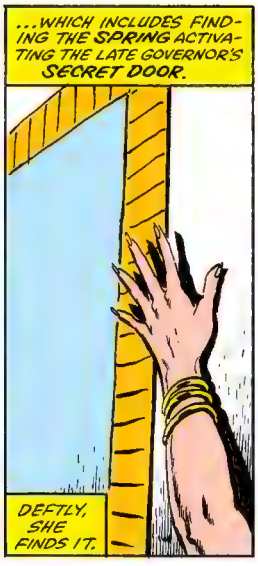

I AM THANARA, A HIGH-BORN LADY OF MAYPUR.
KING YEZDIGERD HAS GRACIOUSLY APPOINTED ME ONE OF HIS PERSONAL AGENTS--THE EYES AND EARS OF THE KING, AS WE CALL--
MUST YOU GO ON HOLDING MY HAND LIKE THAT? I'M NOT ARMED.

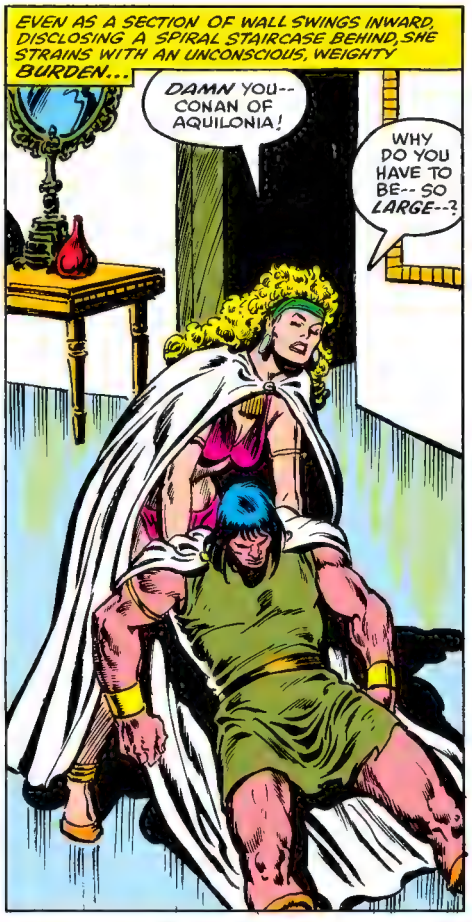

AH, MY THANKS! BUT, MY THROAT IS DRY--AND YOU MUST BE THIRSTY AFTER KILLING.
THIS WINE IS THE BEST FROM VEZIZ SHAH'S OWN CELLAR.
WHILE WE DRINK, I WILL TELL YOU THE STORY YOU DEMAND.

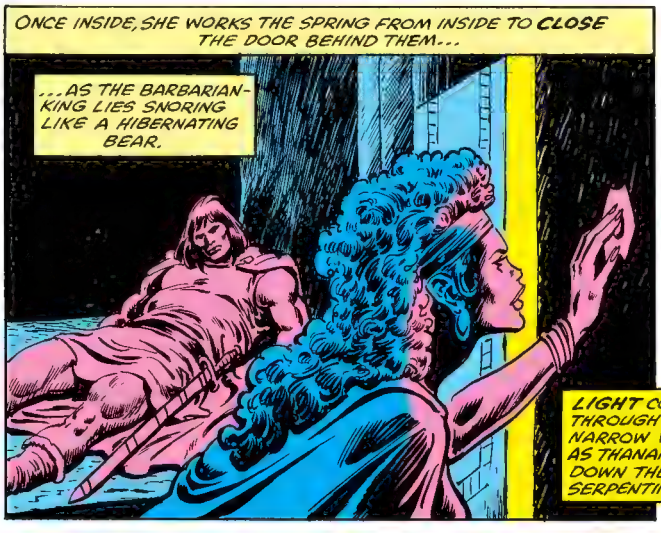
NOW, AS I WAS ABOUT TO SAY-- WHEN WORD CAME THAT YOU HAD EMBARKED ON YOUR LONELY JOURNEY, I WAS SENT TO SUPERVISE THE WORK OF THE STUPID MERCENARIES ENGAGED BY OUR AGENTS IN TARANTIA.
I SUPPOSE THAT--
WHAT IS WRONG, O CONAN?
I WAS BORN A BARBARIAN, WOMAN. WE USE MORE SENSES THAN OUR EYES ONLY.
IT TOOK ONLY THE SLIGHTEST SNIFF TO TELL ME OF THE THREAT THAT LURKS WITHIN THIS CUP.
NO! I SWEAR I--
I'LL SUPERVISE YOU, STRUMPET!
NOW, YOU'LL-- WHAT??
EVEN THE SMALLEST PINCH OF THE POLLEN OF THE YELLOW LOTUS ACTS QUICKLY...
...VERY QUICKLY.
UNNNH
SNORE ON, CONAN OF AQUILONIA!
FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS, YOU WILL BE LIKE A MAN STONE DEAD!

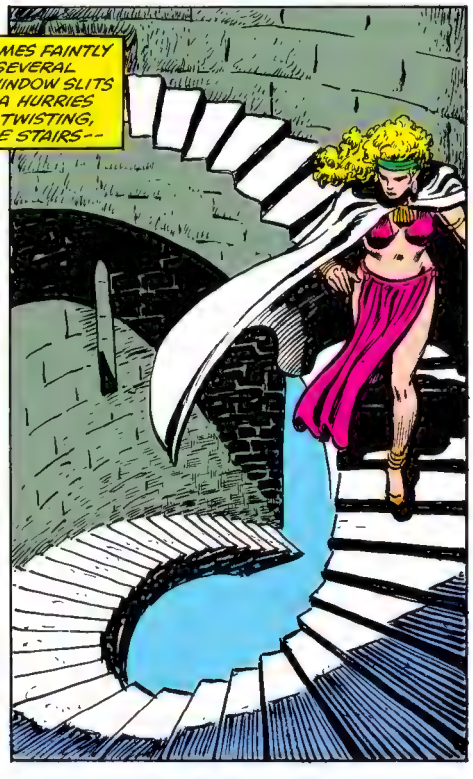

IT WOULD BE FUN TO KILL YOU NOW, EVEN AS YOU SLEEP DEEP-- BUT I HAVE ORDERS, FROM YEZDIGERD HIMSELF, YOUR OLDEST ENEMY.*
*SEE CONAN THE BARBARIAN #19. --ROY T.
THUS, I MUST ACT SWIFTLY TO--
WHAT'S THAT?
NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, A RISING MURMUR FROM WITHOUT ATTRACTS THANARA'S ATTENTION...
AND SHE IS APPALLED AT WHAT SHE SEES THROUGH A WINDOW OVERLOOKING THE SQUARE:
TARIM'S BLOOD!
HOUSES AFLAME, FIRED BY THE RAVAGING ZUAGIR HORDE--
SHRIEKS OF CAPTIVE WOMEN--THE CURSES OF BATTLING MEN--
BUT NO TURANIAN SOLDIERY IS TO BE SEEN.
EVIDENTLY CONAN ENTERED THE FORT NOT ALONE AS SHE HAS THOUGHT-- BUT IN THE COMPANY OF THE DESERT WOLVES!

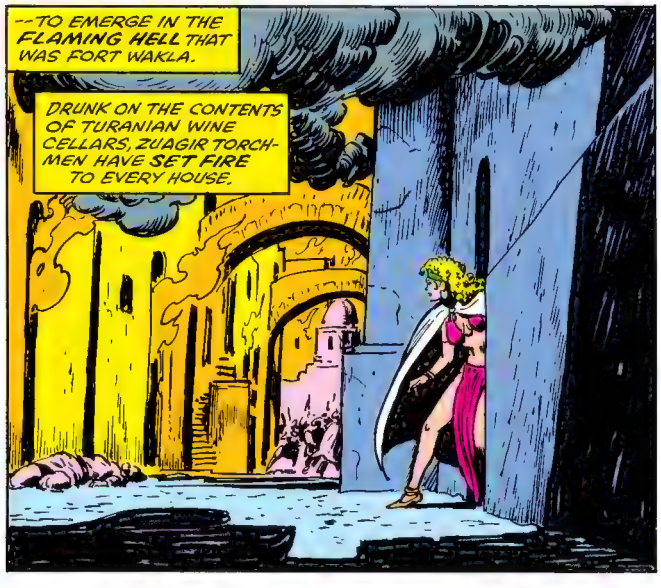

A SEASONED SPY, THANARA COLLECTS HER WITS, WHICH ALREADY ARE HATCHING A PLAN...

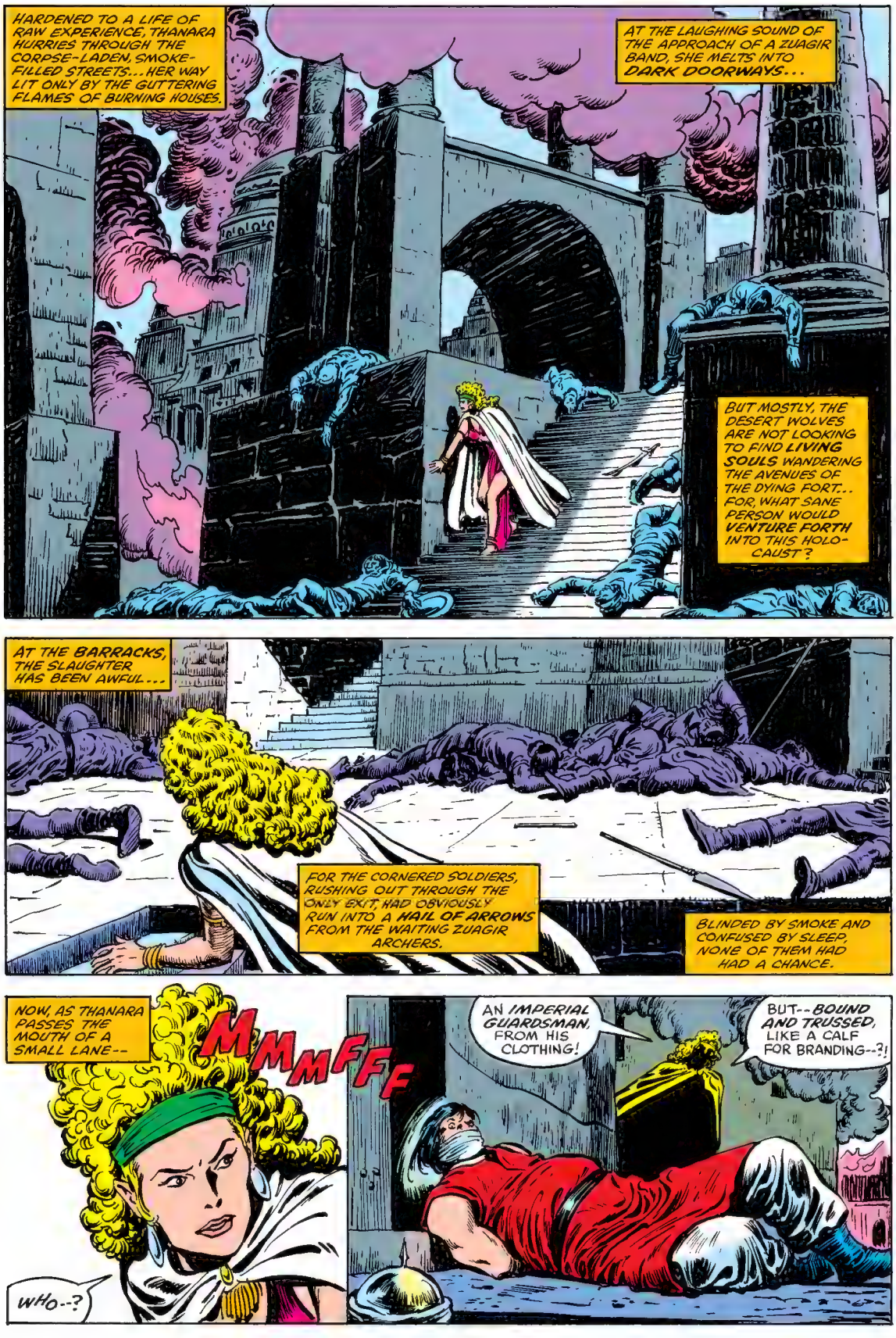

...WHICH INCLUDES FINDING THE SPRING ACTIVATING THE LATE GOVERNOR'S SECRET DOOR.
DEFTLY, SHE FINDS IT.


EVEN AS A SECTION OF WALL SWINGS INWARD, DISCLOSING A SPIRAL STAIRCASE BEHIND, SHE STRAINS WITH AN UNCONSCIOUS, WEIGHTY BURDEN...
DAMN YOU-- CONAN OF AQUILONIA!
WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE-- SO LARGE--?


ONCE INSIDE, SHE WORKS THE SPRING FROM INSIDE TO CLOSE THE DOOR BEHIND THEM...
...AS THE BARBARIAN-KING LIES SNORING LIKE A HIBERNATING BEAR.

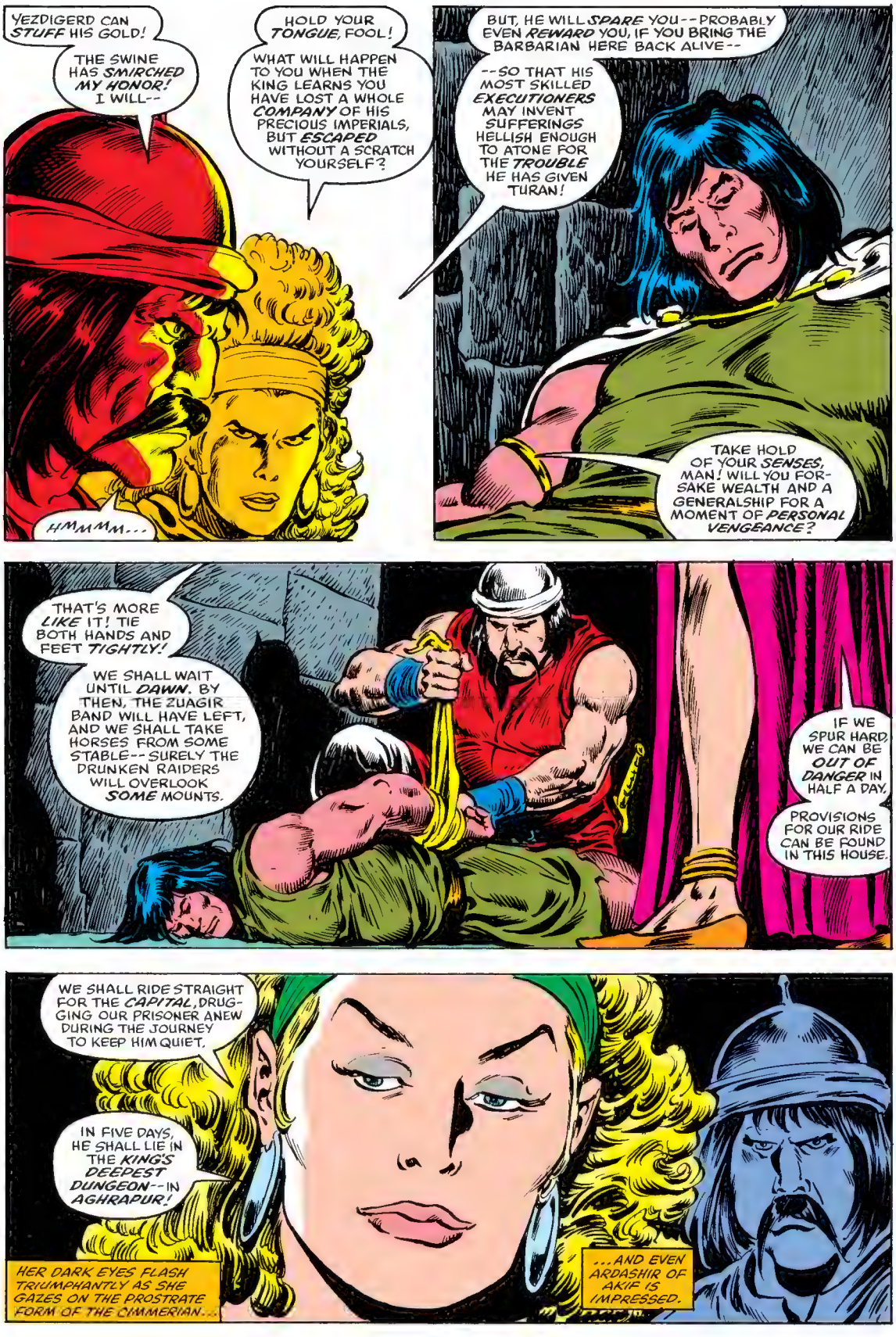

LIGHT COMES FAINTLY THROUGH SEVERAL NARROW WINDOW SLITS AS THANARA HURRIES DOWN THE TWISTING, SERPENTINE STAIRS--


--TO EMERGE IN THE FLAMING HELL THAT WAS FORT WAKLA.
DRUNK ON THE CONTENTS OF TURANIAN WINE CELLARS, ZUAGIR TORCHMEN HAVE SET FIRE TO EVERY HOUSE.

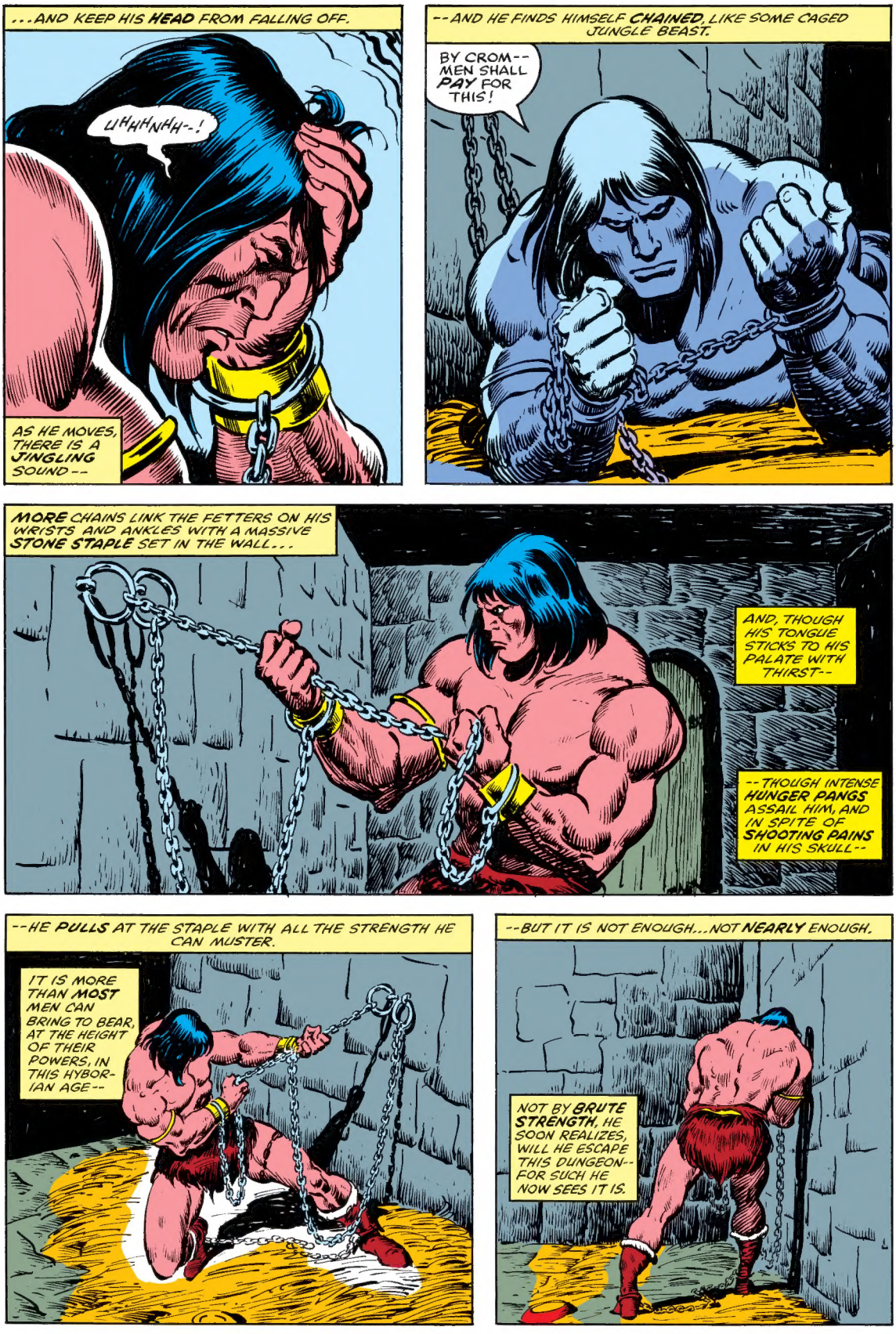

HARDENED TO A LIFE OF RAW EXPERIENCE, THANARA HURRIES THROUGH THE CORPSE-LADEN, SMOKE-FILLED STREETS... HER WAY LIT ONLY BY THE GUTTERING FLAMES OF BURNING HOUSES.
AT THE LAUGHING SOUND OF THE APPROACH OF A ZUAGIR BAND, SHE MELTS INTO DARK DOORWAYS...
BUT MOSTLY, THE DESERT WOLVES ARE NOT LOOKING TO FIND LIVING SOULS WANDERING THE AVENUES OF THE DYING FORT... FOR, WHAT SANE PERSON WOULD VENTURE FORTH INTO THIS HOLOCAUST?
AT THE BARRACKS, THE SLAUGHTER HAS BEEN AWFUL...
FOR THE CORNERED SOLDIERS, RUSHING OUT THROUGH THE ONLY EXIT, HAD OBVIOUSLY RUN INTO A HAIL OF ARROWS FROM THE WAITING ZUAGIR ARCHERS.
BLINDED BY SMOKE AND CONFUSED BY SLEEP, NONE OF THEM HAD HAD A CHANCE.
NOW, AS THANARA PASSES THE MOUTH OF A SMALL LANE--
MMMFFF
WHO--?
AN IMPERIAL GUARDSMAN, FROM HIS CLOTHING!
BUT--BOUND AND TRUSSED, LIKE A CALF FOR BRANDING--?!

ARDASHIR OF AKIF!
HOW CAME YOU TO THIS SORRY PASS? SURELY IT WAS NO DRUNKEN ZUAGIR WHO TOOK THE TIME TO--
IT WAS THAT CURSED DEVIL CONAN--ONCE THEIR WAR-CHIEF! HE HAS RETURNED, MILADY THANARA!
THAT I KNOW, FULL WELL AS YOU.
NOW COME--AND KEEP SILENT!
WITH THE HABITS OF AN OLD SOLDIER, ARDASHIR ACCEPTS HER LEADERSHIP WITHOUT ARGUMENT.
THE JOURNEY BACK TO THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE IS MOSTLY UNEVENTFUL, EVEN AMID THE CARNAGE...
MADE BLEARY-EYED AS MUCH BY EASY TRIUMPHS AS BY WINE, THE TWO ZUAGIRS CHARGE, SWORDS ALOFT--
...SAVE FOR ONE PAIR OF LEERING, DRUNKEN DESERT RAIDERS:
WELL, WELL... WHAT HAVE WE HERE, DOG-BROTHER?
A WENCH, BY THE SAND-DEMONS!
HAII!
LET ME FINISH THIS FLAGON, AND WE'LL KILL THE DOG WITH HER, SO WE CAN--
ARDASHIR--!
LEAVE THEM TO ME, MILADY!
BUT THEY CANNOT MATCH THE SWIFT STROKES OF ARDASHIR'S SCIMITAR...
YYYYY

...AND SOON, NO ONE OPPOSES THE TURANIANS' PATH BACK TO THE PALACE.
AAAAWRRK
YOU HAVE DONE WELL, ARDASHIR OF ARIF.
KING YEZDIGERD HIMSELF WILL REWARD YOU FOR YOUR ACTIONS ON MY BEHALF THIS DAY.
AND ON HIS OWN, AS THEY BOTH KNOW.
BEST HURRY, MILADY THANARA! I HEAR ZUAGIR VOICES--!
I MADE NOTE OF THE SECRET SPRING WHEN I CAME OUT, SO I--AH! HERE IT IS!
I HAVE A SURPRISE FOR YOU AT THE TOP OF THESE STAIRS, GUARDSMAN.
A SURPRISE? SURELY, AMID ALL THIS BLOOD-LETTING, THERE'S NO TIME TO--
HAH!? THAT DOG CONAN!
BY THE GODS, I'LL--
CALM YOURSELF! KNOW YOU NOT THAT THE KING WILL SHOWER US WITH GOLD IF WE BRING THE BARBARIAN TO HIM ALIVE?


YEZDIGERD CAN STUFF HIS GOLD!
THE SWINE HAS SMIRCHED MY HONOR! I WILL--
HOLD YOUR TONGUE, FOOL!
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOU WHEN THE KING LEARNS YOU HAVE LOST A WHOLE COMPANY OF HIS PRECIOUS IMPERIALS, BUT ESCAPED WITHOUT A SCRATCH YOURSELF?
HMMMM...
BUT, HE WILL SPARE YOU--PROBABLY EVEN REWARD YOU, IF YOU BRING THE BARBARIAN HERE BACK ALIVE--
--SO THAT HIS MOST SKILLED EXECUTIONERS MAY INVENT SUFFERINGS HELLISH ENOUGH TO ATONE FOR THE TROUBLE HE HAS GIVEN TURAN!
TAKE HOLD OF YOUR SENSES, MAN! WILL YOU FORSAKE WEALTH AND A GENERALSHIP FOR A MOMENT OF PERSONAL VENGEANCE?
THAT'S MORE LIKE IT! TIE BOTH HANDS AND FEET TIGHTLY!
WE SHALL WAIT UNTIL DAWN. BY THEN, THE ZUAGIR BAND WILL HAVE LEFT, AND WE SHALL TAKE HORSES FROM SOME STABLE--SURELY THE DRUNKEN RAIDERS WILL OVERLOOK SOME MOUNTS.
IF WE SPUR HARD, WE CAN BE OUT OF DANGER IN HALF A DAY.
PROVISIONS FOR OUR RIDE CAN BE FOUND IN THIS HOUSE.
WE SHALL RIDE STRAIGHT FOR THE CAPITAL, DRUGGING OUR PRISONER ANEW DURING THE JOURNEY TO KEEP HIM QUIET.
IN FIVE DAYS, HE SHALL LIE IN THE KING'S DEEPEST DUNGEON--IN AGHRAPUR!
HER DARK EYES FLASH TRIUMPHANTLY AS SHE GAZES ON THE PROSTRATE FORM OF THE CIMMERIAN...
...AND EVEN ARDASHIR OF AKIF IS IMPRESSED.

Days later, in Aghrapur:
With head whirling, stomach knotted with nausea, and throat parched, Conan the Cimmerian slowly regains his senses.
His last memory is of sitting on the sumptuous couch of Vezir Shah, governor of Fort Wakla...
But even before smarting eyelids creep open, the stench in his nostrils tells him he is no longer in a governor's palace.
Rats scatter loathesomely, as he struggles both to sit up--


...AND KEEP HIS HEAD FROM FALLING OFF.
UHHHNHH-.!
AS HE MOVES, THERE IS A JINGLING SOUND--
--AND HE FINDS HIMSELF CHAINED, LIKE SOME CAGED JUNGLE BEAST.
BY CROM-- MEN SHALL PAY FOR THIS!
MORE CHAINS LINK THE FETTERS ON HIS WRISTS AND ANKLES WITH A MASSIVE STONE STAPLE SET IN THE WALL...
AND, THOUGH HIS TONGUE STICKS TO HIS PALATE WITH THIRST--
--THOUGH INTENSE HUNGER PANGS ASSAIL HIM, AND IN SPITE OF SHOOTING PAINS IN HIS SKULL--
--HE PULLS AT THE STAPLE WITH ALL THE STRENGTH HE CAN MUSTER.
IT IS MORE THAN MOST MEN CAN BRING TO BEAR, AT THE HEIGHT OF THEIR POWERS, IN THIS HYBORIAN AGE--
--BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH...NOT NEARLY ENOUGH.
NOT BY BRUTE STRENGTH, HE SOON REALIZES, WILL HE ESCAPE THIS DUNGEON-- FOR SUCH HE NOW SEES IT IS.

STILL, HE IS ALIVE--AND SOMEONE MUST WANT HIM SO. THUS--
HO, GUARDS! WOULD YOU LET A MAN PERISH OF HUNGER AND THIRST?
FETCH FOOD AND DRINK!
WHAT CURSED NOOK OF HELL IS THIS?

MOMENTS LATER, WITH A PATTER OF FOOTSTEPS AND A JINGLE OF KEYS...
SO, THE WESTERN DOG HAS AWAKENED!
KNOW YOU THAT THESE ARE THE DUNGEONS OF KING YEZDIGERD'S PALACE AT AGHRAPUR.
I HAVE ORDERS TO BRING YOU FOOD AND SHELTER, AND SO I SHALL...

YOU WILL NEED TO FILL YOUR BELLY--TO APPRECIATE THE RECEPTION OUR KING HAS PREPARED FOR YOU!
THEN, THRUSTING A LOAF AND A SMALL JUG THROUGH THE BARS, THE JAILER GOES AWAY--
--HIS CACKLING, MADDENING LAUGHTER RESOUNDING HOLLOWLY IN THE CORRIDOR BEYOND, SO NEAR AND YET SO DISTANT.
AND CONAN STARES GRIMLY, SILENTLY, INTO THE BLACKNESS BEYOND...!

MITRA! SO THEN WHAT HAPPENED, TROCERO?
YOU ARE HERE, ARE YOU NOT, PRINCE CONN?
AH, BUT HOW HE DID SO--AND HOW HE CONTINUED HIS SEARCH FOR QUEEN ZENOBIA, YOUR MOTHER--
TELL ME--FOR I PERISH WITH CURIOSITY!
MY FATHER DID ESCAPE, DIDN'T HE?
--THAT IS A STORY FOR ANOTHER NIGHT--!

AYE, AND A TALE THAT WILL BE TOLD

NEXT ISSUE: **THE SEA OF BLOOD!**

KING CONAN

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

LOUISE JONES
EDITOR
DANNY FINGEROTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Marvel,

Time flies when you're reading comics. It's difficult to believe that it's been over ten years since Thoth-Amon made his first appearance in the pages of CONAN THE BARBARIAN #7.

Back then, who would've ever thought that there would one day be a companion comic named KING CONAN, or that the final epic confrontation between the evil wizard and the barbarian king would take place in the fourth issue of that publication.

Now, after a decade, it's all over. Despite all his scheming, I'll miss the old boy. In his own way, he was the Dr. Doom of the Hyborian Age. However, I'm sure that he'll be replaced by a host of malefic successors during the course of the next ten years. I can hardly wait.

Kevin C. McConnell
118 Main Avenue
Warren, PA 16365

Dear Staff,

This is the first letter I've ever written to any Marvel comic and I'm glad to say it's to one of my favorite magazines. I've only been collecting comics for one year now and I'm very, very impressed with the work being done at Marvel. The most valuable and most important item I own is my comic collection.

I'm pleased to say that KING CONAN #4 will sit near the top of my collection. "Shadows in the Skull" was magnificent. The team of Roy Thomas and John Buscema was wonderful! I'm looking forward to seeing more of their work on the KING CONAN magazine.

The relationship between Conan and his son, Prince Conn, is definitely one of unbreakable love and care. One character always seems to be looking out for the other. Prince Conn is undoubtedly following in his father's footsteps. He plays a very important role in this book. He was the first to figure out that the women were really the serpent folk and later on in the story he comes to his father's rescue and unexpectedly slays Thoth-Amon from behind. But is Thoth-Amon *really* dead?

That was the second time Prince Conn saved his father's life. As I recall, in KING CONAN #3, Prince Conn slew King Menaunii, breaking the ghostly serpent spell that was overcoming Conan. Please don't ever take Conn out of this magazine. I can relate to him so much because he's my age.

I especially like the ending where Conan thanked his son for saving his life, and then the two walked off into battle together. Let's just hope no conflict arises between the two. They're terrific.

Bob Fifacchione
10 Weston Lane
Smithtown, NY 11787

People,

Having just bought and read KING CONAN #4, I can only say it was great! I have always wanted Conan to meet up with the serpent-men face to face. Do you pronounce "Conan" with a long or a short "o"?

Troy Mecey
Rt. #1
Bonne Terre, MO 63628

With a long "o".

Dear Roy, John, and Ernie,

KING CONAN is the best comic I've seen in years. It's Great!!! I'm looking forward to the next KING CONAN ish.

Joe Bagley
Box 185
Prentice, WI 54550

Dear KING CONAN crew,

First I would like to compliment your very fine work, both story- and art-wise. But I have a few questions to ask.

1) Why wasn't Barry Windsor-Smith asked to be guest artist for KING CONAN #3? And will Barry Smith be appearing in future issues?

2) I'm an art student and lover of illustration and I wonder, will there someday be printed a special mag for the newest artists to send their work into?

3) Will any of REH's other works be put into special magazines of their own?

Again I must compliment you guys for the great facial expressions and highest excellence of character portrayals I have seen ina long time. Thanks for making comic books worth the cost!

Valorie Furlano
Providence, RI

To answer your questions, Valorie:

1) Barry's present interest lies in illustration, not comics, but he knows that if ever he has it in mind to take pen to comic book page, he'll hear a rousing cheer from Conan readers the world over.

2) At present, no magazine featuring the work of new artists exclusively is scheduled, but who knows about the future? They don't call us the House of Ideas for nuthin'.

3) Although no other REH characters are scheduled to get their own magazines at present, issue #26 of BIZARRE ADVENTURES will feature REH's King Kull, while issue #28 of the same magazine will feature Red Sonja. They're special stories you won't want to miss!

Dear Editor:

I know Conan can't stay young forever, but personally I hate the idea of him growing a moustache or beard! A few age lines and a li'l 5 o'clock shadow are enough for me. American Indian men pulled out their whiskers as they grew in. Could you make this the tradition in Aquilonia?

And, seeing that Conan can't stay around forever, are you planning any Prince Conn adventures in the distant future?

Debbie Billieux
Bug Hill Road
Ashfield, MA

Although we cannot imagine a future without Conan, Debbie, that future Conan will, as far as we can see, remain clean shaven. So you can breathe a sigh of relief.

We've received several requests for stories about the adventures of Prince Conn, however, and *that's* certainly something to consider.

Dear folks,

KING CONAN #4 was indeed different than I had expected. I thought that King Conan would fight Thoth-Amon until both were weak and then, with every last ounce of energy, Conan would hurl his sword right into TA's heart. But, to my surprise, Prince Conn killed him. Well, I will say that, although kids are people, too, Conan deserves to kill the worst men.

Also, Prince Conn had a girl. Well, do you think that the younger readers of this book should see this, although it's everywhere else? I mean, there should be somewhere they can turn to to see something but sex. (Although Conn *is* Conan's son!)

Also I would like to ask, How does Buscema draw KING CONAN, CONAN, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN and still have time to do his own books?

Larry Jones
Meridian, MS 39701

Big John Buscema works very, very fast and very, very hard. He is also very, very good!

'Til next issue —
Louise Jones

THE MIGHTY MARVEL CHECKLIST

- ☐ **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #76** — **Giant-Man** and the **Iceman** join the ever-lovin', blue-eyed **Thing!**
- ☐ **SPIDER-WOMAN #38** — Guest-starring the uncanny ***X-Men!***
- ☐ **STAR TREK #14** — "We Are Dying, Egypt, Dying!"
- ☐ **DAREDEVIL #171** — DD vs. the Kingpin!
- ☐ **MARVEL SUPER HEROES #98** — (Reprints Hulk #149) — "The Inheritor from Beyond!"
- ☐ **DAZZLER #4** — Final battle with **Dr. Doom!** Plus: *Nightmare!*
- ☐ **KA-ZAR #3** — The fear-fraught fate of Shanna!
- ☐ **KING CONAN # 6** — Conan's quest for his kidnapped queen!
- ☐ **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #217** — *Sand-Man* and *Hydro-Man* team up and attack!
- ☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #258** — Who is ...*Blockbuster?*
- ☐ **THOR #308** — Loki and Karnilla attack New York!
- ☐ **MICRONAUTS #30** — "To Save Homeworld!"
- ☐ **GHOST RIDER #57** — Enter: The Apparition!
- ☐ **SAVAGE SHE-HULK #17** — "Make Way for...the Man-Elephant!"
- ☐ **MOON KNIGHT #8** — Moon Knight goes *mad!*
- ☐ **DR. STRANGE #47** — Dr. Stange — powerless against Ikonn, the master of illustion!
- ☐ **INCREDIBLE HULK #260** — Showdown in Japan with Glenn Talbot!
- ☐ **AVENGERS #208** — The mad menace of the eternal warrior called the *Berserker!*
- ☐ **CONAN #123** — "Horror Beneath the Hills!"
- ☐ **MARVEL TALES #128** — (Reprints Spider-Man # 151) — The shocking return of a suprise super-villain!
- ☐ **X-MEN #146** — The old and new X-Men at the mercy of ***Dr. Doom!*** Plus: Arcade!
- ☐ **ROM #19** — ROM is trapped in Limbo — with all his old foes!
- ☐ **POWER MAN/IRON FIST # 70** — Cage and the Fist hot on the trail of drug smugglers!
- ☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR #231** — Stygiax blasts the Baxter Building into the Negative Zone!
- ☐ **MARVEL TEAM-UP #106** — Spidey and **Captain America!**
- ☐ **IRON MAN #147** — A crisis called...*Blacklash!*
- ☐ **PETER PARKER #55** — The menace of Nitro, the Exploding Man!
- ☐ **DEFENDERS #96** — The Defenders and **Ghost Rider** at the mercy of the Six-Fingered Hand!
- ☐ **MARVEL SUPER ACTION #32** — (Reprints Avengers #71) The Avengers and the Black Knight vs. The Grand-Master and Kang!
- ☐ **STAR WARS #48** — Leia and Vader play a strange game of power, propoganda,... and Death!
- ☐ **MASTER OF KUNG FU #101** — *'Not Smoke, Nor Beads, Nor Blood!"*
- ☐ **MARVEL PREMIERE #60** — Featuring... **Dr. Who! Cover painting by** *Paul Gulacy.*
- ☐ **SGT. FURY #164** — (Reprints Sgt. Fury #70) — Meet: the Missouri Marauders!
- ☐ **WHAT IF #27** — *"What If* ***Phoenix*** *Had Lived?"*

MARVEL MAGAZINES

- ☐ **CRAZY #74** — "Crazy Cars of the Future"; "Finger vs. Finger"; "The Elephink Man!"; a "Dallas" parody; Kinetic Kids; Obnoxio; Howard the Duck; and more. Whew!
- ☐ **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #64** — The terrible secret of the "Children of Rhan!"
- ☐ **MARVEL PREVIEW #26** — King Kull stars in Doug Moench and **John Bolton's** "Demon In a Silvered Glass!", featuring some of the finest artwork to ever grace a Marvel production. And the writing ain't nothin' to sneeze at, either!

--A MIGHTY MARVEL
KING CONAN
PIN-UP!
ERNIE CHAN 1981